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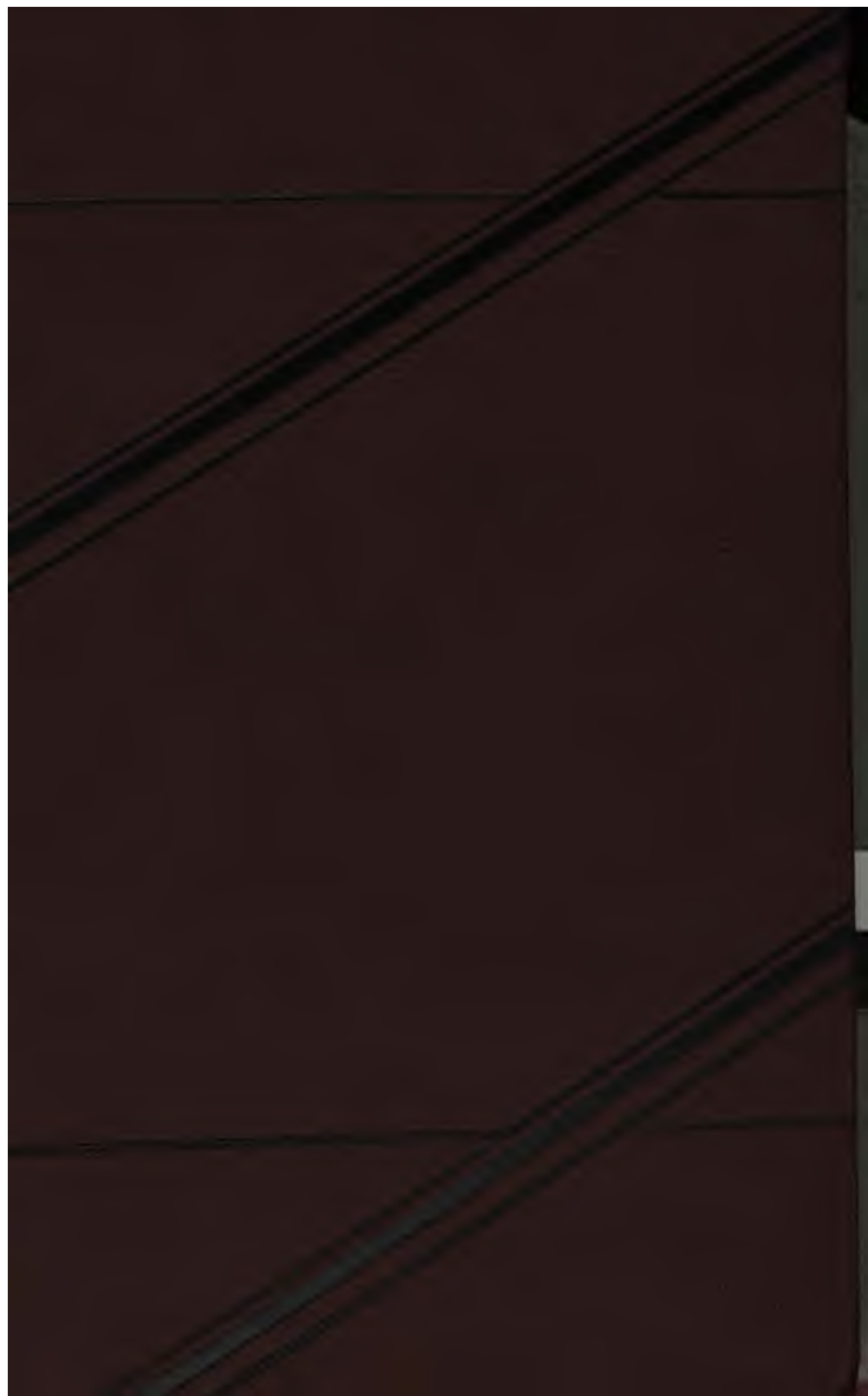
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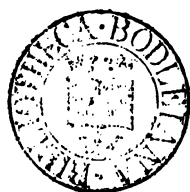
EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE.

VOL. I.



EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE

THREE VOLUMES.—I.



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I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE publication of these Experiences was not sought by me. It was the suggestion of the friend who found out that I had kept a diary, got hold of it, and persuaded me to let him make extracts from it, and then further persuaded me to expand those extracts into something like literary shape ; not (as he was candid enough to tell me) because he thought that there was anything remarkable in the diarist, but because the people amongst whom I have spent the greater part of my life—normal

as they have long seemed to me—seemed out-of-the-common to him. Of course, however, I trust that in letting these records be taken from their obscurity I have not been influenced by vanity, or other unworthy motive. *Vanity*, though, do I say? In spite of the self-flattery with which the most secret diaries are written, trying to persuade the writer through his eyes (when there is no one else to be deceived) that he is a better man than his heart tells him that he is, even my own confessions will show that I have small reason to be vain.

Young people, I suppose, would reckon me old. At any rate, I remember blooming young brides who are now grandmothers, and children that I have nursed have now children of their own; but (if any man *can* read his own heart) I may honestly say that no proffer of preferment would tempt me to leave the squalid dis-

trict in which my hairs have grown grey. I should like to lay them within the shadow of the mother-church in which I began my East-End labours. Wise sanitary arrangements have rendered this impossible, but I hope to be buried in the Tower Hamlets' Cemetery. In a fluctuating population like that in which I have laboured, personal ties are very often suddenly snapped; but I have a personal attachment to the *type* of people who have been so long my neighbours, and it would gratify me to know that my old body would sleep within the circle of the smoke and noise in which they spend their troublous lives.

It would be affectation—falsehood—to insinuate that I was always thus contented. Clergymen, like other men, have their ambitions, and, perhaps, have as much justification for them, and quite as honest a justification, as laymen have, in the hope

of 'securing a sphere of greater usefulness.' But then clergymen are no better judges than other men of what is really for their good. I feel now (if I may say so without irreverence to God's government) that it would have been a great mistake if, in the days when I was by no means inclined to utter a coy *nolo præferri*, I had obtained a benefice. I was *meant* to be a curate amongst struggling people, if, without conceit, I may suppose that I was specially meant to be anything; and I am thankful that I found this out early enough in my career to be able to throw full bodily strength, as well as, I trust, my whole heart's devotion, into curate's labours, without looking upon them as a parenthetical, painful preparation for rest (in this world)—*otium cum dignitate*. Many a heart-ache have those labours caused me, and yet I have found in them an exceeding great reward.

They have been obscure enough, but I would humbly offer a prayer that God may in his goodness bless this humble record of them to the furtherance of the Gospel—peace on earth, good-will amongst men—harbinger and antepast of heavenly joys.

II.

‘LITTLE CREASES.’

WHEN I first came up to town, it was to become junior curate of one of the East End's mother-churches. I lodged in a baker's first-floor rooms. The residence could boast of some ‘amenities.’ When I looked out of my window in rainy weather, I could see—thanks to the under-ground bake-house—the pavement beneath a dry patch in the midst of sloppiness on all sides; and the snow melted there almost as soon as it fell. But, *per contra*, the sickly-sour scent of the new bread was at

times almost stifling, and the floury 'black-beetles' marched up in such squadrons from the bake-house, that I was forced to keep a hedge-hog; and the antidote turned out to be almost as great a nuisance as the bane. I am ashamed to say that at first my temper was ruffled by these trivial annoyances. Just because there was nothing to boast of in bearing them, they annoyed all the more. It was 'Little Creases' who shamed me out of my puerile pettishness.

One sultry summer night, when I was still quite a novice in London, the beetles had kept me awake by crawling over me, and dropping from the bed-curtains like windfall fruit. In the early morning the scent of the hot bread came steaming up the stairs, and to get the nearest approach to fresh air within my power, I half-dressed and threw up one of my sitting-room windows. As I was leaning out of

it, the police-sergeant, who lodged in the room above, clumped up the staircase. 'Morning, sir,' he said, stopping at the open door. 'Up early. Can't sleep, eh? Well, it *is* rather close; but just you look at that little gal cuttin' along there. This is a palace to where she has been a-sleepin', an' yet she's off to the market pipin' like a little lark. She's thankful for the 'eat, she is. It's bitter work for her when she's to turn out in the winter mornin's. I do pity that poor little soul. I've little gals of my own. Little Creases she's known as, and she's been at the cress-sellin', off an' on, this two years, though she ain't eight yet. *Creases!* She don't look much like a *Cræsis*, do she, sir?' and, with a grin at his pun, the pitying policeman mounted towards his bed.

The little girl to whom he had called my attention wore a fragment of a black straw bonnet, with gaping chinks in its

plait, through which her matted curls bulged like bows of dirty silk. A limp, ragged, mud-hued calico frock reached to where the calves ought to have been in her bare, skinny little legs. That was all her dress. In one hand she carried a rusty iron tray, thumping upon it, tambourine-fashion, with the other, as an accompaniment to 'The days when we went gipsying,' which she sang, as she trotted along, in a clear, sweet little voice that justified the police-sergeant in likening her to a lark. At the end of the street she put the empty tray upon her head, and merrily shrilling out, 'Pies! pies! all 'ot! all 'ot!' turned the corner and disappeared.

The next time I saw the sergeant I asked him where Little Creases lived. 'Bottom house in Bateman's Rents; that's Miss Creases's address when she's at home,' was his answer. 'I can't rightly remember just now which room it is, but you ask

any one about there where Little Creases dosses, and they'll show you, sir. She lives with her granny. They're a rough lot down there, but they've some sort of a respect both for the old gal an' the little un, an' they won't insult you, sir, if they think you wants to do 'em a kindness. I'll go with you an' welcome, if you like, when I'm off; but they'll think more on ye, sir, if you don't go with one of us. No, sir, the Force *ain't* popular, and yet it's only our duty that we try to do; and monkey's allowance we get for doin' on it. If you want to ketch the little un in and awake, you'd better go somewheres between six and seven in the evenin'. The little un has to tramp a weary way to sell her stuff, an' she's glad enough, I'll go bail, to go to her "by-by," as my littlest calls it, when she's had her grub. You know your way to the Rents, sir? Second turnin' to the left, arter you pass the Duke o' York.

You can't mistake it, sir—the name's up jist inside the archway.'

On the following evening I found my way to Bateman's Rents. The archway was almost choked with gasping loungers, who looked at first very sullenly at me; but when I inquired after Little Creases, and used the very term which the sergeant had taught me—much as a Moravian missionary might use his first conciliatory bit of Esquimese—the loungers relaxed into a general grin. 'She've jest come in, sir,' said a hulking rough, leaning against a post. 'Jim, go and show the parson where Little Creases *dosses*;' and at this repetition of the friends-making pass-word there was another general grin.

Jim, a shock-headed youth, whose dress consisted of a one-sleeved shirt and a pair of trousers with a leg and a half, upheld by a single brace of greasy twine, speedily piloted me to the bottom of the Rents, and

up a filthy, creaking staircase to the first-floor back of the last house. 'Creases!' he shouted, as we stopped at the open door of a dark little dungeon of a room, 'ere's a parson a-lookin' arter ye. Whatever 'as you been a-doin' on?'

The only window of the room gave on a high dead wall within arm's-length of it; and though half of the window-panes were broken, the room on that hot evening was very close as well as dark. It was very dirty also, and so was the parchment-skinned old woman who sat crouching, from the force of habit, over the little rusty, empty grate. Opposite her sat Little Creases, on the floor. The old woman's half-backed arm-chair, and the low bedstead on which she and her granddaughter slept together, were almost all the furniture. The scantiness of the bed-clothes did not matter so much in that sultry weather; but, hot as it was, it

almost made one shiver to think of lying under them in winter.

‘Yes, sir,’ said the old woman when I had seated myself on the bed, and stated why I had come, ‘Bessie an’ me ’as ’ad our tea. No, we don’t light a fire this time o’ year. It’s heasy to git a potful o’ bilin’ water somewheres or other—our pot don’t take much to fill it. It ain’t much the neighbours can do for us, but what they can they will, I must say that. No, I don’t think I could git any on ’em to clean up my room. They hain’t got the time, an’ if they ’ad they hain’t got the water.’

I was young then, and had a weakness for giving a ‘professional’ turn to conversation; pluming myself on my clerical cleverness when I had lugged in a text of Scripture, *apropos* of anything—more often, in fact, of nothing. I began to talk about the woman of Samaria and the water of life, in a way that I could not help feeling

was hazy even to myself. The old woman listened to me for a time in sulkily patient silence, although plainly without the slightest comprehension of what I meant. I was having my say, she thought, and she would get hers by and by, and would get all the more out of it, if she 'behaved proper' whilst I was talking. She was full of complaints, when her turn came; especially at the hardship of her having to support a great girl like Bessie, although, so far as I could make out, Bessie contributed at least her full share of the cost of the old woman's room-keeping. Finding that I had small chance of hearing anything about Little Creases, except the amount of bread she ate, in her self-contained grandmother's presence, I proposed that Bessie should visit me at my lodgings next morning; and to this arrangement the grandmother grudgingly consented, when I had promised to make good the loss which the

little girl would incur through giving up her work.

I was amused to see how I sank in the 'social' estimation of my new acquaintances when they learnt that I was lodging at a baker's. 'Wilson' was a very rich man in their opinion, and 'made good bread, an' guv fairish weight—better than the English bakers, though he *was* a Scotchman;' but Bessie and Granny had at times bought bread of Mr Wilson, and therefore looked upon themselves as his patronesses, and at me as a 'kind o' make-believe sort o' gen'leman' to be lodging on his first-floor. They evidently felt comforted when they heard that Little Creases was to knock at the private door.

I was looking out for her when she knocked. Had I not been, the 'slavey' most likely would have ordered her off as 'a himpident match-gal as wouldn't take No.'

Bessie was rather shy at first, but when she was asked what she would like to have, she suggested, 'Wilson sells stunnin' brandy-snaps,' with a glibness which showed that she had the answer ready on her tongue. Whilst she was munching her anticipated dainties, I got a little of her history out of her, which I will put together here, as nearly as I can in her own words:—

'My name's Bessie—ye called me so yerself. Some calls me Little Creases, an' some jist Creases—'cos I sells 'em. Yes, Bessie, I s'pose, is my Chris'n name. I don't know as I've got another name. Granny 'as. Marther's 'er Chris'n name, an' sometimes folks calls 'er Missis Jude—sometimes they calls 'er Hold Winegar, but that ain't horfen. No, sir, they don't call 'er that to 'er face. Granny 'ud give it back to 'em if they did, an' they ain't a bad lot—not them as we lives with. No, I can't

remember when I fust come to live with Granny—'ow could I? I was jist a babby, Granny says. Oh, Granny does whatever she can—*she* ain't a lie-a-bed. Sometimes she goes hout cheerin' now, but she ain't strong enough for that, an' the work an' what she gits to drink makes 'er precious cross when she comes 'ome. Yes, I love Granny, though she do take hall I arns. She've a right to, I s'pose. She says so, anyways, 'cos she took me when father and mother died, an' father 'ad wexed 'er. No, I can't remember nuffink o' them—an' I don't see as it matters much. There's kids in the Rents as 'as got fathers an' mothers as is wuss hoff than me. Well, I s'pose, when I grows up, I can spend what I gits accordin' to my own mind. But I 'on't forgit Granny. She may growl, but she never whopped me—an' some on 'em *does* get whopped. Yes, sir, I knows I ought to be thankful to Granny for takin' care on

me afore I could git my hown livin'—didn't I say so? No, I can't read, an' I can't write. I never went to school. What's the good o' that to folks like me as 'as to arn their livin'? I know 'ow much I oughter give a 'and for my creases, an' then 'ow to split 'em up inter bunches, an' I'm pickin' up the prices o' hother thinx at the markets, an' that's hall a gal like me need know. Readin' an' writin' may be hall wery well for little gals as can't 'elp theirselves, but I don't see as it would be hany 'elp to me. Yes, I likes to look at picturs sometimes in the shops, but I can make out what they means—them as I cares about—wi'out readin'. Where does I git my creases? Why, at the markit. Where else should I git 'em? Yes, it *is* cold gittin' up in the dark, an' the creases feels shivery when you git a harmful, when the gas is a-burnin'. But what's the good o' growlin' when you've got to do it? An'

the women as sells 'em is horfen kinder in the winter, though they looks half-perished theirselves, tuckin' their 'ands under their harms, wi' the frost on 'em. One on 'em last winter guv me a fair markit-'and when I 'adn't got no stock-money, an' the browns to git a cup o' cawfee an' a bread-and-butter. Golly, that did do me good, for it was hawful cold, an' no mistake. If it 'adn't been for the pain in 'em, my toes an' fingers seemed jist as if they didn't belong to me. But it's good fun this time o' year. We 'ave our larks when we're a-pumpin' on the creases, an' a-settin' on the steps tyin' 'em up. Rushes we ties 'em with. No, we 'avn't to pay for the rushes—they're gived us by them as sells the creases. Yes, I think I've seed rushes a-growin'—in 'Ackney Marshes—but there wasn't much in that, as I could see. I'd rather be where there was houses, if *that's* country. It's sloppier than the streets is.

No, I don't go to church. Granny says that she used to go, but they never give her nuffink, so she dropped it. 'Sides, Sunday's when I sells most. Folks likes a relish a-Sundays for their breakfastes an' teases; an' when I ain't a-walkin' about, I likes to git a snooze. 'Sides, I hain't no clothes fit to go to church in. No, an' I don't go to theaytres an' that, nayther—I sh'd like to if I'd got the browns. I've 'eared say that it's as fine as the Queen a-hopenin' Parli'ment—the Forty Thieves at the Pawilion is. Yes, I've seed the Queen once. I was in the Park when she come along wi' them fine gen'lemen on 'ossback a-bangin' away at the drums an' that; I s'pose them was the Parli'ment. I never was so far afore, an' I ain't been since, an' I was wery tired, but I squeegeed in among the folks. Some on 'em was swells, an' some on 'em was sich as me, an' some on 'em was sich as shopkeepers. One hold

feller says to me, says he, "What do you want 'ere, my little gal?" "I want to see the Queen, an' Prince Halbert, an' the Parli'ment gen'lemen," says I. "I'm a Parli'ment gen'leman," says he, "but I ain't a goin' down to-day." I worn't a-goin' to let 'im think he could do me like that, for he worn't dressed nigh so smart as Wilson a-Sundays. "You're chaffin'," says I; "why hain't you got a 'oss, an' a goold coat, an' summat to blow?" Then he busted out larfin' fit to kill 'isself; and says he, "Oh, you should 'ear me in Parli'ment a-blowin' my own trumpet, an' see me a-ridin' the 'igh 'oss there." I think he was 'arf-silly, but he was wery good-natur'd—silly folks horfen is. He lifted me hup right over the people's 'eads, and I see the Queen wi' my own heyes, as plain as I see you, sir, an' Prince Halbert, too, a-bowin' away like them himages in the grocers' winders. I thought it was huncommon

queer to see the Queen a-bowin'. I'd 'spected that all on us would a-'ad to bob down as hif we was playin' 'oney-pots when she come by. But, law, there she was a-bowin' away to heverybody, an' so was Prince Halbert. I knew 'im from the picturs, though he didn't seem 'arf so smart as the gen'leman that druv the 'osses. What a nice-lookin' gen'leman, though, that Prince Halbert is! I do believe that himage in the barber's winder in Bishops-gate, with the goold sheet on, ain't 'arf as 'ansome. Wisher may die hif he didn't bow to me! The queer hold cove I was a-settin' on, guv me 'is 'at to shake about like the other folks—law, 'ow they did shake their 'ats an' their 'ankerchers, an' beller as if they'd bust theirselves! An' Prince Halbert grinned at me kind-like; an' then he guv the Queen a nudge, an' *she* grinned, an' guv me a bow too, an' the folks all turned round to look at me, an' I felt as

hif I was a swell. The hold cove was huncommon pleased, an' he guv me a 'arf-a-bull, so Granny said he was a real Parli'-ment gen'leman arter all.'

'And what did you do with the money, Bessie?' I asked.

'Guv it to Granny.'

'But didn't you get any of it?'

'Oh, yes. Granny'd a blow out o' trotters, an' she guv me one, an' huncommon good it were.'

A little girl who had sold water-cresses for two years, with no more memorable treat than a trotter, could not be injured, I thought, by a little indulgence. If I confirmed Bessie in her opinion that, in the complimentary words she had already used in reference to me, I wasn't 'sich a bad sort, arter all,' I might be able to 'get hold' of her, and eventually do her more good than giving her a little passing pleasure. Still I was at a loss how to carry

out my plan of giving her a day's treat; so I asked her to choose her entertainment for herself.

‘Well,’ she answered promptly, ‘I should like to ’ave some more to heat bimeby;’ and then, after a minute’s pause, ‘an’ I should like to go up the Moniment. I’ve horfen seed the folks at the top like rats in a cage; an’ I should like to ’ave a look down through them railin’s, too.’

Little Creases’ costume, although it attracted little attention to herself, was likely to make a clerical companion stared at, even in London’s crowded streets, where men brush past each other never heeding, —frowning, and laughing, and even talking, as if they were in a dark, double-locked room alone, instead of publishing their secrets of character, at any rate, in broad noon, to the one in ten thousand who may have leisure or inclination to notice them. I thought, however, that it

would be a bad beginning with Bessie, if I wished to secure her confidence, to seem to be ashamed of her clothes. So I got my hat, and proposed that we should start at once. When I took hold of her hand outside the front door, I could see that she thought that in my case, as in that of her parliamentary friend in the Mall, wit was not equal to good-will. We were chaffed a little as we walked along. A policeman asked me if I wanted to give the little girl in charge, and when I answered that the little girl was taking a walk with me, looked more than half inclined to take me into custody myself. 'Oh, he's a-doin' the good Samaritan dodge in public, Bobby,' explained a sneering on-looker; 'lettin' 'is light shine afore men. He don't mean no more mischief than that. I know the ways o' them parsons. They'd be precious deep, if they knew how.' I must confess that this gloss upon my behaviour did annoy

me, because I felt that I had laid myself open to it. But is it not a satire on our Christianity that we should think it 'very odd' to see a person in whole clothes talking to one in rags, unless the continuously clad person be either bullying or benefiting the intermittently clad from the top of a high cliff of universally admitted social superiority?

I do not know who takes the money at the Monument now. At the time of which I write the money-taker was a very morose old fellow, who seemed to regret that the gallery had been caged in. 'You can't fling her over,' he growled, as we began to mount the weary, winding stairs.

'Did you hear what he said, Bessie?' I asked, with a laugh.

'Oh yes, I 'eared 'im,' little Creases answered gravely; 'but I ain't afeared. I'd scratch so as ye couldn't, if ye wanted to, an' it ain't sich as you does thinx to git

put in the papers. It's chaps as can fight does them kind o' thinx.'

For a wonder, the day being so fine, we had the gallery at first to ourselves. 'That's a buster,' said Bessie, as she mounted the last step, 'I'll 'ave a blow now. Law, 'ow my legs do ache, an' I feel dizzy like. I shouldn't ha' been 'arf so tired if I'd been a-goin' my rounds.'

'And yet you wanted to come up, Bessie?'

'Well, I know I did—helse I shouldn't ha' come.'

'There are other people besides you, Bessie, that want to get up in the world, and then, when they do get up, are half sorry that they took the trouble. So you may be content to carry about your tray.'

But analogical moralizing of this kind (as I might have expected, had not those been the salad days of my surpliced life) shot quite over Bessie's head.

‘ Who said I worn’t content ? ’ she asked, in angry bewilderment. ‘ What’s the Monument got to do wi’ creases ? I shall work them till I can get sumfink better.’

Bessie was more interested when I explained to her the meaning of the ‘ goold colly-flower,’ as she called the gilt finial; but she was very much disappointed when she was told that the Great Fire after all had not been caused by Roman Catholics. ‘ They’d ’a done it, if they could, though,’ she commentated. ‘ I can’t abide them wild Hirish—they’s so savage, an’ they’s so silly. There’s Blue Anchor Court close by the Rents as is full o’ Romans, an’ they’s al’ays a-pitchin’ inter each hother wi’out knowin’ what’s it all about. Law, ’ow they do send the tongses an’ pokers flyin’ of a Saturday night ! An’ the women is wuss than the men, wi’ their back hair a-’angin’ down like a ’oss’s tail. They’ll tear the gownd hoff a woman’s back, and

shy bricks, an' a dozen on 'em will go in at one, hif he's a-fightin' wi' their pal an' is a-lickin' on 'im, or heven hif 'e ain't—an' the men's as bad for that. Yes, the Henglish fights, but they fights proper, two and two, an' they knows what they's fightin' for, an' they doesn't screech like them wild Hirish—*they's* wuss than the cats. No, it ain't horfen as Hirish hinterferes wi' Henglish hif the Henglish doesn't worret 'em. Why should they? What call 'as sich as them to come hover 'ere to take the bread hout o' the mouth of them as 'as a right to 't?'

Bessie's superciliously uncharitable comments on Irish character were suddenly interrupted by an expression of surprise at the number of churches she saw rising around her through the sun-gilt grey smoke. 'Law, what a sight o' churches! Blessed if that ain't St Paul's!' When Bessie had once found an object

which she could recognize, she soon picked out others that she was familiar with—the Mansion House, the Bank, the Exchange, ‘the Gate,’ as she called Billingsgate, the Custom House, the Tower, &c. ‘Law, ’ow queer it looks hup ’ere!’ she constantly kept on exclaiming. The sensation of seeing a stale sight from a novel stand-point seemed to give her more pleasurable excitement than anything she had yet experienced on this to her eventful day. Instead of leaving her to enjoy her treat, and the new experience to teach, on however small a scale, its own lesson, I foolishly again attempted to moralize.

‘Yes, Bessie,’ I said, ‘things and people, too, look very differently according to the way they are looked at. You have been taught to hate the Irish, but if you could see them as some people see them, perhaps you would like them—if you could see them as God sees them,

from a higher place than the Monument, you would love them.'

'Granny says they're nasty beasts,' was Bessie's sullen answer.

'Yes, Granny has been taught to call them so, just as she teaches you; but if Granny, too, would look at them differently she would speak of them differently.'

'I don't see as Hirish is much worth lookin' at, any 'ow.'

'Well, but, Bessie, you said the churches, and the shops, and so on, that you've seen all your life, looked so different up here.'

'They don't look a bit nicer,' Bessie answered sharply, having at last got a dim glimpse of my meaning. 'I'd rayther see the shop windows than them nasty chimbley pots;' and, fairly floored, I once more desisted from my very lame attempt at teaching by analogy.

'Now, the river do look nice,' Bessie

went on in triumph, as if pursuing her argument. 'But law, what mites o' thinx the bridges looks hup 'ere! My! hif that ain't a steamer, an' there's a sojer hin it, I can see 'is red coat. It look jist like a fly a-puffin' about in a sarcer. Look at them barges, sir, wi' the brown sails, ain't that nice? Hif I worn't a gal, I'd go in a barge. It 'ud be so jolly to doss a-top o' the 'ay an' stor an' that, and not 'ave no walkin'. Ah, them's the docks—there where the ships is as hif they couldn't git hout. Yes, I've been in the docks—not horfen. They stops sich as me, and hif you do git hinside, they feels you hover when you comes out, as hif ye'd been a-priggin'. No, I never did nuffink o' that; Granny oodn't let me if I'd a mind, an' I shouldn't like to git locked up in the station-'us. Blessed hif the 'osses doesn't look as hif they was a-crawlin' on their bellies like black beadles! An' there's a gal a-

shakin' a carpet in that yard, an' now there's a cove a-kissin' on 'er! He's cut in now, 'cos an old ooman 'as come hout. That's the gal's missis, I guess, but I don't think *she* seed 'im. Law, what jolly larks you might 'ave on this 'ere moniment, watchin' the folks without their knowin' on it. If they was to put a slop hup 'ere he could see 'em a-priggin', but then he couldn't git down time enough to nail 'em.'

'But God can always see us, Bessie, and reach us, too, when we do wrong.'

'Then why don't He? What's the good o' the pollis? P'r'aps, though, God 'don't like to see the bobbies a-drivin' poor folk about. Granny says they're hawful 'ard on poor folk.'

I had again been unfortunate. Of course it would have been easy to answer poor little Bessie with satisfaction to myself; but as I felt that it would be only with satisfaction to myself, I was the more

dissatisfied that in my 'prentice attempts to sow faith in divine government, I should have generated doubts. As the best thing I could do under the circumstances, I tried to remove Bessie's prejudice against the police as a body, although I was disagreeably conscious that, owing to my clumsiness, I had mixed up the 'station-'us' and Providence in a very bewildering fashion in my little hearer's mind.

'Are the police hard to you, Bessie?' I asked.

'Some on 'em is—wery,' she answered.

'Well, Bessie, it was Sergeant Hadfield, that lodges at Mr Wilson's, who told me where to find you. He spoke quite kindly about you. If it hadn't been for him, you wouldn't have had your fun up here.'

'I never said nuffink agin 'im.'

'But if one policeman is kind, why shouldn't others be?'

'P'r'aps they may be, but there's a many as ain't.'

Bessie was a very obstinate little reasoner; and when I parted from her in Monument Yard, I could not help contrasting with bitter humiliation the easiness of calling and fancying one's self a Christian teacher of Christianity, and the difficulty of acquitting one's self as such. Little Creases will turn up again in these loosely strung jottings. I will only add here in reference to her, that I walked home to my lodgings puzzling over those words of the child-loved Lover of children, 'For of such is the kingdom of heaven.' There seemed somehow an incongruity between them and the precociously shrewd, and yet lamentably ignorant, little Bessie; and yet I felt that the poor little Londoner must be as dear to Jesus as any Judæan boy or girl He ever blessed.

III.

MY FIRST DEATHBED.

WHEN I reached my lodgings, I had scarcely put my latch-key into the key-hole before the door opened, and there stood Mrs Wilson nerving herself for an oratorical effort.

‘ Haskin’ your parding, sir ’ (it is needless to say that Mrs Wilson was not Scotch), ‘ me an’ Wilson will take it kind if you won’t bring any more of your poor people into our first-floor. We has little uns, an’ so has the sergeant, an’ there’s no sayin’ where them dirty critturs comes from, or

what fevers they brings with them. And hif you *will* hexcuse me, sir, it ain't respectable to see sich as them goin' in an' out of a honest tradesman's 'ouse.'

It was plainly the dread of social, rather than sanitary contagion that had prompted worthy little Mrs Wilson to this bold speech—bold for her, in spite of the repeated apologies, since she was a great reverencer of the clergy. Both her pleas, however, were so plausible that I promised to remember in future that I was not dwelling under my own roof. I could see that the little woman had been expecting opposition from the way in which she brightened up.

'I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, sir, an' so is Wilson, for he wouldn't like to lose you as a lodger, sir, though he don't belong to the Church; an' I 'ope you'll hexcuse the liberty. "It's wery kind o' Mr B—, an' that we can't deny," says I to

Mrs 'Adfield. "An' nobody wants to deny it, Mrs Wilson, ma'am," says she to me, "he's a dear good gentleman to look after sich as them, but then you see, Mrs Wilson, ma'am, both you and me is mothers." Oh, deary me, sir, I ought to have given this to you at once. The vicar's servant brought it an hour ago, and it's marked to be delivered immediate.'

What Mrs Wilson handed me was a note from the vicar, stating that a woman had just called at his house with a request that a clergyman would go to see a young person who was dying at hers; the vicar added that he knew nothing of the case, that he could not possibly go himself, owing to an inevitable engagement, and, giving the address, asked me to start at once to see the poor creature.

'Do you know Sutton Place, Mrs Wilson?' I inquired.

'Oh yes, sir—it's that quiet little street,

with the neck like a bottle, that runs out o' Grimes Street, and leads to nowhere. There's a wall at the bottom with "Try Boag's Blacking" in big white letters on it. You can see 'em as you go along Grimes Street. One o' the boys shall go with you, or Wilson will, an' I'll mind the shop.'

But I knew Grimes Street, and felt sure that in so short a street I could not fail to find Sutton Place after Mrs Wilson's description. It proved to be one of those double rows of modern houses that get squeezed into previously unoccupied spaces between older houses in London—the new not looking even as substantial as the old, and squalid with a drearier ready-made squalor—making you think somehow of poor little babies that ought to have been born fresh as dew, but *have* been born scarred by the sins that their fathers and grandfathers have committed. The roadway was unpaved, pitted, and littered with

all kinds of rubbish; and intermittent little reaches of cracked and crumbling kerbstone were the only sign that footpaths had ever been thought of there. The cramped little two-floored drab houses looked more mildewedly miserable than the smoky, indistinguishably-red-brick houses around them. But Sutton Place could boast of one proof of 'gentility,'—there was not a 'shop' in it. A dress-maker's fly-spitten card hung over one fly-spitten muslin blind; over another of brown Holland hung a tailor's announcement that 'Gentlemen's own materials' were 'elegantly made up within;' from the lintel of one door protruded a painting of a mangle; one wire-blind, upside down, bore the tarnished gilt name of somebody, agent for some insurance company, but that had evidently been bought second or seventh hand. Most of the houses, even my limited acquaintance with London life

enabled me to see, were sub-let, in floors or rooms, furnished and unfurnished, to lodgers..

A slatternly woman, with a very smutty face, answered my knock at No. 9. Making her face still smuttier by smearing it with her greasy, grimy apron, she said sulkily, 'You're the parson, I s'pose,' and ushered me up-stairs. The bed, and the blind, and a box were almost the only furniture of the back-room I entered. 'Yes, she've sold her things, poor crittur,' said the landlady, noticing my glance round the unexpected bareness of the room; 'an' she've paid me honest up till next Saturday. I will say that, though I needn't, an' it's a deal o' bother 'avin' folks dyin' that way in your 'ouse. Of course, the parish must bury her, an' look arter the boy; but it ain't pleasant to a woman as works 'ard to pay her way to 'ave folks dyin' in their 'ouse like that. Some would

ha' got 'er out afore this—pinchin' herself as she did; but I 'adn't the 'eart to do it, when the rent was al'ays ready some'ow. I never lost a penny by the poor crittur—that I will say—an' she'll be gone afore Saturday.'

On the bed lay a terribly emaciated young woman. Her face was so completely skin and bone that in one sense it was horrible to look at; and yet there was something in it that made me think the poor creature had once been very handsome. The long brown hair that bulged down upon her angular shoulder, and spread like a flood over the scanty bed-clothes, was very silky. The almost transparent hand that drooped at the bedside was beautifully formed. A wedding-ring was on its proper finger, but only kept from falling on the floor by the crooking of the second joint. It seems heartless, somehow, to give these details, but I saw them far more quickly

than I have written them down. When the landlady saw me glance at the fourth finger, she said glibly, 'Oh yes, sir, there's no doubt she's an honest woman—a lady, too, I reckon, once upon a time—though that's all the gold she's got about her now, I'll go bail. I'll see, though, she's buried in it. The parish shan't 'ave it.'

On the box sat a handsome frightened little boy, sobbing as if he would choke at every breath he caught. He looked sickly, but not with the gaunt look of his mother; and, though his clothes showed signs of wear, they were what is called 'good' in material and cut. 'Mamma won't speak to me,' he sobbed, when I put my hand upon his shoulder.

When I stooped over his mamma, I thought at first that her soul had already fled; yet a minute afterwards her big blue eyes opened, dim at first, but the film seemed to be shrivelled up by the bright-

ness that shot through it, and she gaspingly whispered, 'Pray—pray—pray!'

My thumb was in my Prayer-Book at the Visitation of the Sick, and, hastily kneeling down, I began with the first prayer my eye fell on: 'O Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need; We fly unto Thee for succour in behalf of this Thy servant, here lying——' But as I said it, a strange wild light—half-greeting and half-yearning farewell—came into the young creature's eyes. Her boy rushed to her, and clutched her as if her body as well as its spirit were being wrenched from him. 'God bless—be a good—' she stammered; and as she tried to fling her arms round his neck, her head fell back upon the flabby pillow, with an awfully beautiful smile upon the blue pinched lips.

IV.

MR JONES.

No doctor had attended the poor creature. At the inquest the coroner severely censured the landlady for not sending for one.

‘Sich is the hingratitude o’ human natur, sir,’ remarked the woman, indignantly, when we met outside; ‘an’ me as give the young person a cup o’ tea the last Saturday as ever was. I ’on’t grudge it ’er, though, pore dear. Arter all, she did die as pleasant as a party could, consid’rin’ the succumstinces.’

There is something so awful in the thought of a human being 'starved to death' in the midst of millions of fellow-creatures in the richest city in the world, that juries shrink from returning that literal verdict. In this case there was the usual periphrasis about some *itis* or other, 'accelerated by insufficient nourishment.' There could be small doubt, however, that the poor young thing *had* been literally starved to death on that bright day when even the dingy street-markets looked like overflowing horns of plenty, as the golden sunlight fell on their stalls high-heaped with summer produce. Little else was elicited in reference to her at the inquest. That her name was Emily Smithers, that she appeared to have 'known better days,' and to have been deserted by her husband, and that for three or four years she had 'supported' herself and her little Fred by sempstress-work, shoe-binding, and the

other precarious shifts to which women 'brought up to nothing' have to resort when they find themselves friendless and moneyless in London, and have discovered that their poor, mediocre little playing, singing, painting, &c., which once secured them so many compliments, are absolutely worthless as bread-winners. That was what the non-medical evidence came to.

Little Fred would have fallen to the care of the parish, had not one of the jurors put in a claim for him. This was an old man of the name of Jones, dusty and dried up as a withered walnut. His face was thatched with a yellowish red wig, whose eaves came down almost to his eyebrows. He was the only jurymen of whom I knew anything; and what I knew had not prepossessed me in his favour. He sold birds, &c., and I had bought my hedgehog of him, and had had to pay, as I thought, a very exorbitant price for it.

The questions he asked and the remarks he made at the inquest, moreover, had increased my prejudice against him. I thought him a hard, grasping little man, with about as much milk of human kindness in him as the wrinkled walnut he so much resembled had juice. To Mr Jones, however, the parish authorities willingly gave up little Fred, then between four and five. But this willingness did not reassure me. Of course, they were glad to ease the rates anyhow, I reasoned.

I determined to make inquiries about this Mr Jones. When I made them of Mrs Wilson, she answered:—

‘The bird-shop man in Grimes Street, sir, do you mean, where you bought that nasty thing that’s al’ays gettin’ into the children’s beds, if you’ll hexcuse me, sir? He ain’t a sociable kind o’ man, but his bark ’s a deal wuss than his bite, I’ve heard say. He’s ’ard at a bargain; but,

law, if you're soft enough to give people what they hask, what's to become on yer in London? But Mr Jones ain't a bad man, sir. He's done a many kind things to my knowledge; an' if *he's* took the little boy, he'll hact fair by 'im; an' it ain't a bad thing for the little chap, for Jones 'as got money in the bank, though he do look sich an old guy. I wonder 'is birds ain't afeard on 'im; ain't he like a scarecrow? But we mustn't go by folkses' looks, as you were a-sayin' last Sunday, sir, but judge righteous judgment; an' I think Jones ain't a bad man, though nobody can say he is a beauty, an' he *is* al'ays a-runnin' on agin women. That's because he couldn't git any one to 'ave 'im, I expect. Any'ow, he hain't got chick nor child 'cept them he's got in his shop. If he takes to the little boy, he'll do well by 'im, you may depend on that, sir.'

A day or two after this conversation I

turned into Grimes Street to see how little Fred was getting on. I found him, dressed in a neat though coarse tunic of black stuff, sitting in a great cage outside the shop, and playing happily with two little black-and-tan spaniels that were the other occupants of the barred cage or kennel. Besides the dogs, a couple of dirty, depressed swans in a packing-case were exposed for sale outside, a coop or two of poultry, some white and grey and purple and cinnamon-coloured pigeons, a black-bird in a wicker-cage, a hutchful of white and sandy rabbits, and a bowl of gold and silver fish, whose flashing sides contrasted queerly with the dull brass trellis-work that covered the globe's mouth. A chained cockatoo moped on its perch in the doorway, putting up its sulphur-hued, serrated crest angrily when I went by. The shop-windows and the shop-walls were lined with little cages in which larks, linnets,

goldfinches, chaffinches, bullfinches, greenfinches, thrushes, canaries, redpoles, and blackcaps were singing, twittering, and springing and dropping from perch to perch. On the counter there was a trayful of still, semi-torpid tortoises; above the parlour-door a squirrel on the treadmill; and here and there a cage of rats or pink-eyed ferrets; a parrot or two, three or four starlings, a magpie, whose once glossy black and white were as rusty as a ship's paint after a long voyage; half-a-dozen guinea-pigs, a fox, a brace of dozing old owls, and four young owls huddling together, and looking sleepier and sulkier even than their elders, were other members of the menagerie; more empty cages and bundles of wool and artificial moss drooped from the ceiling; and Mr Jones was mixing German paste in his shirt-sleeves.

‘ Servant, sir.

“Will you walk into my parlour?”
Said the spider to the fly.
“’Tis the prettiest little parlour
That ever you did spy,”

was his eccentric greeting, as he motioned me into a little room behind the shop, almost choked with ferns and flowers and birds and beasts, living and stuffed.

In a cramped little backyard, on which the window gave, there were more birds and beasts; three or four sluttish ducks, that were dipping their bills into a shallow dish of water in the middle of the yard, looking especially melancholy prisoners.

‘You was at the inquest, I remember,’ he went on, when we had seated ourselves. ‘Come to look after the boy, I suppose? He’ll do, poor little chap—he’s jolly enough now—p’raps you saw him as you come by. I thought he’d cry his eyes out, though, at the funeral. I got him rigged somehow, and took him. Though what rubbish that black is, sir, if what you preach is true.’

‘I am very glad to hear you come to church.’

‘I don’t come to church, sir, and I’m not ashamed to tell you so; but I expect I know more about those kind of things than a good many of them as do go to church. If you think your friends has gone to glory, why should you go on as if God had robbed you? And if you don’t think your friends has gone to glory, what’s the good of makin’ yourself more dumpish than ever with those gloomy things, and pulling down your blinds, and that? Not but what three parts of it is all humbug. People are proud of their new black togs, and nicely they run into debt to get ’em. More fools they—widows and such—when they want every penny they can scrape together to keep ’em. They’re half afraid that the neighbours should think they weren’t fond o’ their dear departed. It diverts their thoughts, though, all that funeral fuss—

and it keeps the undertakers goin'; so p'r'aps there's some good in it. Anyhow, I must be fool enough to put a band on my hat and buy a black suit ready-made to go to that poor young thing's buryin'. I got some black togs run up for the kid, too—what he's got on is only for him to knock about in. I don't think much o' women as a rule, but it was cuttin' somehow to see that poor young creature round the corner, when we went to view the body; and to hear that poor little feller a-tellin' his little story. How the poor little chap did blubber—for all he's gammocking now. I thought I should ha' blubbered too. I don't like big lads—they're almost as bad as women; but I do like little kids. When I was puttin' that there little Fred in along wi' the dogs to please him, I had a comical thought. He looked so pretty, I wondered the angels—if there is angels—didn't ketch

little boys an' gals an' keep 'em as we keep goldfinches.'

'But what do you think of doing with the boy?'

'Oh, I haven't bothered my head about that yet. I'll send him to school by-and-by, but just now I let him amuse hisself, and he amuses me, for it was lonesome sometimes not to have a soul to speak to when the shop was shut except the birds and things and my old Black Pete, and he's deaf and dumb.'

'Black Pete! who is he?'

'He's my man of all work, sir—an old bachelor like myself—and we get on together famous. I wouldn't have a woman in the house, not if you paid me, much less pay 'em wages. I never buy a talkin' parrot if I can help it—they're so much like women, for ever pratin' about what they don't understand, an' then puttin' their

heads a-one side as if they was thinkin' "ain't it wonderful such a handsome thing as me can talk so sensible?" Pete and Fred have taken to each other (but Fred likes me best), and we shall manage famous now — ain't this a pretty place, sir?'

'I certainly didn't expect to find such a place here.'

'It don't seem like London, do it, with the flowers a-blowin' an' the birds a-singin'? I was al'ays fond o' the country—I used to go out bird-ketchin' afore I got this shop, and every Sunday afternoon, when I've put up the shutters, I go out for a tramp somewheres.'

'You do keep open in the morning, then?'

'Yes, because then's when I get most customers.'

'But you'll let the boy go to church? I am sure his mother would wish it.'

‘All right, sir, and to Sunday-school, too, in the mornin’, since, p'r'aps, as you say, his poor mother would ha' wished it; but I can't have him stived up on the hot afternoons. That seems to me to be a queer way to try to make youngsters like religion—settin' 'em tasks on the day o' rest, an' keepin' 'em frizzlin' in a chokin' school-room like sassengers in a fryin'-pan. Though I make my livin' by birds, I don't like to see the little beggars—them as has known what liberty is—cooped up on such a day as this. If I could afford it, I'd let 'em all out—'cept the foreign birds, and the canaries, and the mules, and the t'others I've bred.'

‘By all means let the little fellow have as much fresh air as you can give him, but you must remember that his heart and his mind want fresh air as well as his lungs. He is a solemn charge—all the more, rather than the less, because you have

taken it on yourself. You mustn't neglect him, Mr Jones.'

'You needn't be afraid that I shall corrupt the boy's morals, sir. I don't drink, and I don't swear, and if my notions about some things ain't like yours, I shan't talk about 'em to the boy till he's old enough to judge for hisself. You teach him what you like on Sunday mornin's, and I'll take him for a country walk the rest o' the day, and tell him what I know about what he sees. That can't do no hurt. If the same God made the world and the Bible, one on 'em can't make you think less o' the other, to my thinkin'. I do believe that God made a good bit o' the world, but I seem to myself, when I think about it, to be a queer bit o' work to be turned out by Him as made the stars. But there's worse puzzles in the Bible. You read the Sermon on the Mount, and then you read one o' them cursin' Psalms.

I've read that them as wrote the Bible was only God's pens. So I could understand that there should be a difference in the writin'—a quill pen don't write like a steel pen—but the meanin' ought to be more alike, to my thinkin'.'

'But, Mr Jones, let me—'

'No, sir, we won't get into a argeyment, if you please. There's no good in argeyment—it gets your blood up like boxin'. All that you want to do is to floor the t'other feller, an' in argeyment there's nothin' to keep you from hittin' below the belt, an' kickin' him when he's down. I look about me, and I read, and I think, and p'r'aps I shall find out the rights o' things some day; p'r'aps I shan't; p'r'aps there *is* no rights o' things, and one man's notion is as good as another's, because none on 'em is any good—just his fancy. Anyhow, argeyment never did me any good. A man don't like to have to knock

under. Why, even when I've been read-in' a book, that can't crow over you, and I've come across somethin' that didn't suit my notions, and yet, just at the time, I couldn't think how I'd answer what it said, if it was a man talkin' to me, I've sent the book flyin'. You've got your ways o' thinkin', sir, and I've got mine; and we'll keep 'em, till we can get better. Argeyment won't do no good. We should be just where we was before, and worse friends, perhaps. It ain't often I let out what I think. Most of the people I've to do with don't think any more about such things than them parrots, and such as fancy they do know somethin' would scream and answer like them parrots. I don't say you are such as that, sir, but I know all you've got to say, and that you must say it because you're a parson, just as you'd have to cry, "Dust, hoy!" if you was a dustman.'

'That's rather hard, Mr Jones; but, as a

means of getting to understand each other better, I will let you have your say to-day.'

'Why, ain't it fair that I should say what I've got to say, without hearin' what you've got to answer? It's what you parsons do every Sunday, and now, perhaps, you can understand a bit how savage that makes them as thinks for theirselves. No, sir, as I said afore, we'll have no argeyment. I never asked you to make my acquaintance, but if you like to come here now and then to look after the boy, you're welcome; and if you please to have a chat with me, you're welcome; but what's the good o' argeyment? It's only confusin' to the faculties. Now, sir, sometimes when I'm smokin' in here, all by myself, without any one to throw me off the track with their but-thises an' but-thats, it's surprisin' how clear I seem to see things. If you'd like to make up your sermons here

now and then, you're welcome. I can lend you a Bible and a Prayer-book too. Though I don't believe all that's in 'em, I'm very fond o' readin' both. If you're country-bred, the flowers and the birds will cheer you up a bit when your stomach's turned by what you'll see, and hear, and smell in the holes you'll have to go into, if you try to do your duty.'

V.

RUS IN URBE.

IN spite of the fragrance of Mr Jones's flowers, the foetor of his ferrets, &c., was too powerful to permit his 'Russian Herby,' as he called it, to be considered, by persons possessed of normal noses, a very enjoyable retirement; and, since bursts of song were very rare amongst his birds, the chirping, clucking, cackling, croaking, snarling, growling that were the dominant tones of his menagerie made the notion of sermon-writing in his back parlour a very funnily 'fond imagination.' Nevertheless,

I often found my way thither. I was interested in little Fred at starting, and I became interested in Black Pete, the deaf and dumb man Friday whom the East End Robinson Crusoe had saved from starvation and broken into his uses. I became still more interested in the Crusoe. Being invariably stopped whenever I attempted a defence of the 'way of thinking' which he rather flouted with sly digs and back-hand blows than directly assaulted, I desisted from all attempts to get up an 'argeyment,' and soon found that I had all the better chance of occasionally bringing in my modes of thought without contradiction, in a similar parenthetical manner.

Mr Jones's dislike of an argument is not uncommon, I have found, amongst those who hold analogous views; but I have learned not to attribute it, as I am afraid a good many of us do, to conscious insincerity of professed belief.

Amongst his neighbours, Mr Jones—originally, perhaps, of not the blandest of tempers—had hardened into what I found him. He was not uniformly gracious when I called. Sometimes I was not allowed to enter the ‘Russian Herby,’ but when I did find admittance there, he was courteous enough. To little Fred and Black Pete, so far as I could see and hear, he was always kind; and so he was to his live stock. Of some of his birds and beasts he made such pets that, keen after money though he was, he could be barely civil to customers who took a fancy to them. Others he would not have parted with on any consideration. These he called his lords, because they were raised to the upper house—another name he gave his parlour; those left in the shop being his commons. It was a curious sight to come upon the whole queer Happy Family (for Black Pete took his meals with his master)

taking their tea together in the grove of ferns, fuchsias, geraniums, stocks, mignonnets, musks, balsams, creeping Jennys, and spider-plants, with here and there a tall arum hanging its glossy flag over the jungle like a banana, and lighting up the green gloom with its alabaster lamp-like blossom. The old man generally read at tea-time; and, whilst he read, two or three tame canaries would flutter about amongst the plants, and then perch themselves on his head or his shoulders, sway on his paper, alight on his book, and crane over, looking as wise as if they could read print upside down, clatter about on the tea-tray, and peck at his knuckles and the sugar-basin, hiding behind it like children playing at 'whoop' when he chanced to look up. Meanwhile a tame rat sat at his foot, drumming or nibbling at the boot to attract his attention, and then squatting on its haunches to beg. The old man's hu-

man *protégés*, the golden-haired, fair-skinned little-boy, and the grizzly-woolled negro, were not so familiar with their patron, but they were equally fond of him.

Black Pete had been for years with his master, and yet he still looked at him with eyes that caressed him like a dog's. This poor fellow, Mr Jones had found wandering in the East India Road, hungry and almost naked, followed by a crowd of boys who were teasing him with the cruel gusto which I am afraid not poor boys alone are apt to feel when they have got hold of any creature larger than themselves that they can torment with perfect impunity. The bird-seller took the negro home, and he had lived with him ever since. Black Pete, as his master named him, had never been taught to 'talk on his fingers,' and from the signs he made, it was only possible to guess at his previous history. By means of signs, however, he and his master

were soon able to communicate sufficiently for their needs, and the negro became a very handy help to his benefactor. Mr Jones did not for a moment profess to have been actuated solely by philanthropy in housing the black, and I credited him with all the more benevolence because he made no fuss about it. The bird-seller to the last did not give up the hope of teaching Pete to speak articulately. He had taught starlings to talk, he said, and it was hard if he could not teach a man.

At odd leisure times he and Pete used to make mouths at each other with a patient persistency that was comico-pathetic, but though Pete did his best to imitate the twitchings of his teacher's lips, no sound came from his, and he moved about almost the only silent member of that noisy household.

He never cared to go far beyond the

threshold of the shop, on his own account, owing to his dread of the street-boys; but he would venture out to take little Fred for a walk, and sometimes carry him for miles. Within-doors he let Fred do as he liked with him, grinning at all the child's little tyrannies as if they had been most condescending favours. If Fred had been a princeling, instead of an orphan fed by charity, he could not have had a more obsequious attendant. The tall, black, dumb man trotted after the little fellow like a huge Newfoundland dog, as he made the rounds—delighted as if he had been in a fairy palace—of the shop, the parlour, the kitchen, the cellar, the yard, the bedrooms, the dark loft where the pigeons were bred, and the grimy roof with the black 'dormer' on it, and the smoky scarlet runners 'growing' in cracked, oblong, wooden boxes in the roof-gutter: every part of the

house made more or less delicious to a child's taste by the presence of animals of some kind.

When Fred was taken ill, Black Pete for once turned mutinous. He could be got to do nothing, night or day, but wait on and watch over his little pet. He would not leave the child's bedside, except to get something he saw, or was made to believe, that the child wanted.

When the boy recovered sufficiently to come down-stairs again, Pete still kept close to him, until he was quite well. He nursed him on his knee, he walked about with him in his arms, he brought him shells off the mantel-shelf, he hoisted him on his shoulder that he might be able to look into the cages at which he pointed, and into the eyes of 'Spring'—the first of a set of old-fashioned engravings, 'The Four Seasons,' which adorned the walls of Russian Herby. Spring had a hooped pet-

ticoat and a tiny straw hat, but there was something about the mouth which was a little like poor Emily Smithers, and so, perhaps, poor little Fred liked to look at it because it dimly reminded him of his dead mother. But Pete probably only thought that Fred was very fond of pictures of beautiful ladies. He slipped out mysteriously one evening. He slipped back as mysteriously, and busied himself in the kitchen for an hour or two. He was pasting into a rough album he had made of folded and cut newspaper a large assortment of glaringly coloured prints of female theatrical characters and a few faded engravings of female faces which, by dint of much pointing and the expenditure of all his pocket money, he had procured, as Mr Jones heard afterwards, at a shop about a mile off. That was a long way for Pete to venture by himself, but his wish to gratify Fred made the poor dumb negro brave. He

was rewarded for his trouble and his risk. I chanced to look into the back parlour next day a few minutes after the album had been produced. Fred sat upon Pete's knee as the black turned over the leaves, and it was hard to say which had the happier face. Curiously enough, the first engraving which Pete had pasted in was one of the virgin mother nursing the infant Jesus.

When Fred quite recovered, he still made so much of Black Pete, that Mr Jones grew rather jealous. Both of his *protégés*, he thought, had deposed him from the first place in their hearts.

‘Kids are queer ’uns, ain’t they, sir?’ he said to me one day. ‘You’d ha’ thought, from the way the little chap took on when his mother died, that he’d never ha’ got over it, but cut away to the churchyard after her with the tears on his cheeks. I’m a grumpy old fellow, I know; but I

can understand feelings, if I can't feel 'em. That's a beautiful bit in the Bible about Jacob—"But he refused to be comforted, an' he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mournin'." That sounds nateral. I can fancy that when them you're really fond of is gone, you feel angry that anybody should think you'll ever stop cryin'. But, you see, he got over it—an' that's nateral too. But there Fred was, as if he'd melt like salt when his poor ma died, an' then he took up with the span'els, an' was quite content, an' then he took up wi' me, an' now he's took up wi' Black Pete, an' none of us can be a bit like what that poor young mother of his was. I don't say it ain't rightly ordered that things should be so; but still it do seem hard, even to a old bear like me, that folks should be so soon forgotten by them as they cared most for.'

VI.

REST FOR THE HEAVY LADEN.

AT one time I did duty at a Refuge for the Destitute, or 'straw-yard,' to borrow the phrase of those who received its benefits. I have witnessed many such a scene since; perhaps even more painful scenes, but never before had I had the homelessness that there is to be found in London so brought home to me, as when I first saw the crowd of outcasts whose one great object in life was to put off death a little longer by obtaining the shelter of that rough asylum. That first impression

lingers with me yet. I do not believe that one's heart, like one's muscle, gets harder through exercise. Those really have the deepest pity who have pitied most. But still the *eye* gets accustomed to the saddest sights, and, after even a brief familiarity with wide-spread woe, glances with apparent callousness at objects which would once have riveted it in horror. I remember going through the worst part of one of my parishes with one of the best men whom I have ever known—a parish-ioner who for years had been going about doing good amongst the poor people, in whose midst his place of business was planted; and also with a young lady-friend of his who had been passingly 'interested' by what he had told her of those poor people. He went his rounds as usual—sometimes saying a kindly cheerful, sometimes as kindly sharp a word to those he met; but not looking in the least excited.

His young friend, on the other hand, was in a state of hysterical emotion all the way. When we got out of the slums, the girl, who had done nothing for the poor, thus addressed the man, who had done so much, ‘Oh, Mr —, I could not have believed before that you were *so hard-hearted!*’

To return to the straw-yard. My technical ‘duty’ there was to read prayers and say a few words to the inmates on Sunday morning. Very lame words they were at first—I felt lost without my sermon-case. I do not mean to say that—leaving out of the question the few preachers of any denomination who have a natural gift of oratory—I do not consider the bulk of written sermons superior to the bulk of ‘extemporized’ sermons in grammar, logic, and good taste—and not a whit more ‘dull’ to popular taste, save when the extempORIZER rants; but I do say that I think it a pity that we of the Church of England are

not somehow trained, instead of having to train ourselves after we have entered on our charges, to speak a few simple sentences without book and without stammering.

On the Saturday evening before my first 'duty' at the straw-yard, I went to find it out. The Refuge—the patched and whitewashed ground-floor and first-floor of a dilapidated pile of begrimed drab brick, which seemed to have been once used as sugar-works—stood in a *cul de sac*; but as soon as I got to the corner of the blind lane, I knew where I was. The lane was choked with ragged applicants waiting for the Refuge door to open. The lamp that shone above it was the only lamp in the lane, and it was the only harbour-light in the wide world for a good many of those poor creatures. 'Noblest things find vilest using'—charities that are intended to save from starvation men and women who long

for work, are fastened on by men and women who would scarcely work to save their lives, and also by some who have work that would, at any rate, support them. In that tattered crowd, I was afterwards told, there was a considerable leaven of incorrigible tramps, who had flocked to London winter-quarters after, to them, most pleasant country tours; and there were Irish there, I was also informed, who might have money sewn up in their filthy rags, but yet had come to the Refuge to secure for themselves and their children eleemosynary rations—extra on Sundays. The whole crowd, however, looked most miserable; and I have no doubt that the majority consisted of those who, for a time, were utterly dead-beat in the race of life—who, but for that resting-place, could never have plucked up heart and strength to run the race again, however feebly. Almost every one I saw was most wretchedly clad.

The material, in most cases, was as thin as the quantity was scanty. In a good many, a single covering of limp, flimsy rags hung from the body like the almost-shed bark of an Australian tree. There were babies there, almost bare, with nothing but mother's love and a flapping net-work of dirty calico to warm the blue breasts on which they pillowed their pinched cheeks. The whirling snow came dropping down, and melted into viscous mud. In the mud, like swamp-birds, stood wearied tramps, resting on one swollen foot, the less-chil-blained of the two. To an Englishman's eye shoelessness always suggests the extremity of misery; but the bare-footed little Irish folk, paddling in the mire, seemed the least miserable of the throng. The men and women who sat along the kerb-stones, with stockingless toes sprouting out of their burst boots, looked far more doleful. Standing and sitting on the

narrow pavements, lolling thick and wearily against the walls on both sides of the lane, crowded in the muddy roadway, the outcasts of both sexes, all ages, and a good many countries, were congregated. As a rule, the poor creatures were as sullenly silent—so far as words went—as half-frozen cattle clustered, tail to tail, and head over shoulders, in the corner of a mistily rimy field. Most of the babies even had been stupefied into silence by the cold. Now and then an unstupefied infant raised a piteously shrill and clamorous scream, but a chorus of ‘churchyard coughs,’ with churchyard solos between, was the chief audible proof of the miserable crowd’s presence. There was no quarrelling. Common extremity had tamed the heterogeneous constituents of the throng into mutual forbearance, as wild beasts are tamed by flood and fire. And yet—so ineradicably has the good God, who gave the sea its

countless smiles and the earth its songs of jubilee as innumerable, implanted mirth in the human heart—even here a little chaffing—almost *sotto voce* chaffing—was going on. The jests were often coarse; but that starving folk could jest at all, struck me with wonderment, and, I hope, taught me wisdom. The most cheerful (if I may use such a word, even comparatively, in reference to such people) were, however, I must add, those who were sure of a night's, of two nights' lodging, because they were ticket-holders. Those who were not sure of admission regarded the ticket-holders with stagnant envy, as they muttered their stagnant appreciation of the sound roof and warm, sound sleep they had enjoyed the night before.

When the door was opened—throwing out a welcome gush of warm red light into the cold black lane—the ticket-holders crowded in, only stopping to be identified

by the janitor. Their spirits rose and their tongues were thawed a little as soon as they got inside. They indulged in a little of the normal jostling of a London crowd, and 'Here goes for first wash' cried a voice or two as they made their way to the soap and water waiting for them in great tubs. It was not that they seemed to enjoy their washing, poor creatures—dirt had been too long their familiar—but they knew that they *must* wash before they could get their hunk of bread a-piece. 'It's perished with the cowl'd, I am—me an' the childher. Sure ye'll let us in at oncet, sir-r. Glory be your bed!' whined an Irishwoman with a baby at her breast, and another at her back, and a little girl tugging at her skirt. 'Sure ye know me, sir-r?' 'Oh yes, Biddy,' answered the porter, 'I know you well enough—I *ought* to—but you've no ticket now, and you must take your turn.' 'Is it tickuts

an' turruns that he's talkin' about?' the Irishwoman shouted then, suddenly ceasing to wheedle. 'It's becase I'm Oirish. Had thim he let in all tickuts? Divil a bit of it. He's English, an' so he favours his counthrymen.' Most of those who had to wait like Biddy, however, waited far more patiently. They closed up, as batch after batch of non-ticket-holders was admitted; but they still stood in silence, although thicker and thicker came down the whirling snow. The last admitted were quite white with snow when they got into the lobby, where they shook themselves like water-dogs, and stamped their bare feet and sodden boot-soles, as even quiet horses will at last stamp their hoofs if too long kept waiting, while a clerk entered the names, &c., of the applicants for admission in a bulky volume like a bank-ledger—a Book of Death in Life. These entries were dismal autobiographies

in brief to turn over. The 'Country or Parish' column showed that from almost a' the airts the wind could blow luckless beings had been blown, from all parts of the globe, to beg for a crust in the world's richest city. In the column ironically headed 'Means of Living' there were also saddest items—long lists of callings that had proved broken reeds to their honest followers, and every here and there a dishonest calling which its follower had proclaimed without a blush. The names which some of the women had given themselves were horribly plain, and yet it was even sadder to read after a girl's name the euphemism 'Gay.' *Gay*, poor wretch' when she had come *there* to announce her gaiety; and the next column, 'Last Place of Abode,' declared that for many a night before the streets from which she vainly sought her bread had been her only resting-place. As I turned over that gloomy

register, with the snow fast blinding the shutterless little window of the office in which I read the entries, it was literally blood-curdling to find how many of those then beneath the Refuge's roof had spent the previous, equally inclement, night in the open air. No wonder that, when they had performed their perfunctory washing, and snatched their quarter of half-a-quarter loaf from the piled bread-baskets, they ate as dogs eat, and basked before the roaring fires in the wards like cats. The fires had long been lighted, and so even those who could not get in front of them were still enabled to enjoy them—to drink in their heat at every pore, as a man almost dying of thirst drinks in water. To-night was not to be as yester-night. They were sure of a little food, and of warm shelter. To-morrow all were sure of food and shelter also, and Monday night as well might find a good many of them still there. The

vagrants were perfectly satisfied, and even the beaten working-folk began to hope that work might turn up before Tuesday.

Before the women went to bed, the matron took me up into their ward on the first-floor. It was strangely quiet for a place crowded with women and children. The babies were snuggling and snoring, like little pigs, in the straw with which the Refuge bunks at that time were filled. The bigger little girls were nodding against their mothers' shoulders, or stretched across their mothers' laps. They had munched their own bread and, perhaps, had half of baby's grown-up ration, or shared with baby and mother a basin of exceptional gruel; and now God's sweet sleep had come down on them as his dew comes down upon even the humblest flowers. The women still had a brooding look as they nursed their children on their knees, and stared at the red coals dropping in white flakes; but the

little ones were quiet at last, and *they* were resting, too, in their own way, and seemed to want to make the most of their conscious rest before they sought forgetfulness under the dark rugs that covered the straw-filled bunks. Very few of the matrons and old women were talking. The little talk they indulged in was carried on almost in a whisper. Some of the younger women, of the tramp class, were rather noisy, and inclined to be saucy ; but their spirits were plainly damped by the atmosphere of general depression in which they found themselves. One young girl (*not* of the tramp class, although her dress was even scantier than theirs) sat on the board at the foot of her bunk, with her elbows on her knees, and her head clutched in her hands, staring into the air with the look of a timid creature driven fiercely mad by fear. Her ration of bread lay half-uneaten on her lap. 'If she turns up her nose at it, I won't,' said one of

the tramp-girls ; 'it's a sin to waste good wittles, ain't it, sir ? — 'specially when there's precious little on 'em goin'.' And as she spoke, the tramp ran off grinning to the fire with the uneaten crust. The other girl took no notice of her, and it was some time before I could get her to take any notice of me.

'You must put your trust in God, my poor girl,' I was saying, for the third time, when she turned round sharply upon me with a half-savage, half-whimpering, 'I *have* put my trust in God, and what's come of it ?' And then she flung herself back upon the straw, and kicked and bit and screamed in a fit of hysterics. The matron quieted her down at last, covered her up, and tucked her in. 'There, you lie still, my good girl — you'll be all right to-morrow. You go to sleep now, and forget all about it,' said the matron in a kindly authoritative tone. 'It's easy *saying* that, ain't it, sir ?' she

added. 'It's plain to see what *she'll* come to, poor girl; but she hasn't come to it yet, and I'll give her a kiss, poor thing. She looks somehow as if she'd a mother that used to make much of her, and mayhap it may comfort her. Oh, dear, what a lot of girls there is in London as are where their mothers wouldn't have them!' The poor girl put up her lips, like a baby, to be kissed, when the matron stooped over her; and then for a time her sobs became more convulsive than ever. 'Tut, tut—that's silly,' exclaimed the kindly-severe matron. 'You go to sleep like a good girl, and we'll have a talk to-morrow. If you keep on going on like that, I shall be half sorry I did it.' The girl gulped in her sobs like a chidden child, and in a few minutes was sleeping the deep, apparently dreamless, slumber which is sometimes given to the almost utterly miserable; which others, as miserable, often crave after with a frantic eager-

ness that deprives them of it for weeks together. 'She's country-bred, poor child,' said the matron, as we moved away from the coffin-like bunk. 'She must have come from somewhere about my parts, from the way she talks ; and a pretty girl she must have been when she'd flesh on her face. She looks a good girl, don't she, sir ? but I wonder how long she'll keep so. I've lived in London for many a year, and it's a wonderful place, but I can't like it yet. Think of the thousands of boys and girls it's been bringin' to grief for I don't know how long ! They fancy, poor things, they can better themselves in London, and very high and mighty they think themselves because they live in it, and their brothers and sisters in the country. But I'd sooner have a boy or girl of mine in their graves than in London, without me to look after them—poor lonely dears, with nobody caring twopence about them except to

tempt them to go wrong, and fancying themselves so sharp when all the time they're so silly ! You'll have a talk with the poor girl to-morrow, won't you, sir ? '

When I re-entered the ward below, the men and boys had all turned in. The roar of the replenished fires, the singing of the gas, here and there turned down, the regular or broken breathing of the sleepers, and the footfalls of my companion, the officer in charge, and myself, were the only sounds that disturbed the silence of the long, low, white room. In a few places the smoke of the gas had blurred the whitewash, a few initials and feebly-grotesque caricatures had been traced upon it with charred sticks, the fires chequered it with flickering shade ; but, for the most part, the ceiling, beams, props, and walls were far whiter than the snow outside.

Along the floor, however, stretched long lines of bunks with dark mounds above

them like fresh-made graves. Sometime a mound heaved, and a bare arm came out, and clenched its fist, and gesticulated eerily. But the troubling dream passed over, the arm fell with sudden languor, and the dreamer once more breathed with tranquil regularity. Even on earth the weary, for a few hours, had found rest.

VII.

SUNDAY MORNING AT THE REFUGE.

WHEN I went back to the Refuge next morning the sun was shining in a pale, but still cloudless, blue sky. Even in the East End we have bright suns and blue skies far more frequently than our West End neighbours—so near to us and yet severed from us by so great a gulf—have any idea of. The church bells were ringing cheerfully in the frosty air. The viscous slush of the night before had been caked on the pavements into black and yellow glazed crust, which men and boys

were still picking, and shovelling, and sweeping, into the roadway ; whilst others, with their tools over their shoulders, went about monotonously chanting ‘ Sweep your doorway, mum ? ’ In front of some houses there was a funereal pall of ashes on the pavement—but still now and then, spread out like a sheet on roofs, furring mortar-lines and linen posts, and gathered in tiny drifts in corners, some genuine, unsullied, frost-crisped snow was sparkling. To the well-housed, well-clad, well-fed there is scarcely a prettier or more inspiriting sight ; but it is a shroud-like apparition to the London poor. A ‘ hard-frost ’ to them is a horror, however brightly the sun may shine upon it. There were sad hearts in many of the houses I passed on my way to the Refuge—houses with chimneys that sent forth no smoke, or, if they had fires, the feeblest fires, that were being squeezed to death between almost touching ‘ cheeks ; ’

but the Refuge people, in spite of the frost, had gained a little cheerfulness. They had awoke refreshed, an extra allowance of bread and a little cheese had been served out to them, they had a day of warm rest before them—this Sunday was a little island in their billowy life.

When they all mustered in the men's ward for service, it was touching to note the little attempts which some of the women had made at 'tidying themselves up' in honour of the day. The scarecrow rags had been made to look as trim and continuous as possible, hair had been re-parted and smoothed down, and hands and faces carefully washed. The poor girl I had spoken to the night before was one of the congregation, but she was not one of those who had striven to smarten themselves. She sat as before, with her head between her hands, gazing into a future that was all black to her. Young as she was, the

spring of her hope seemed broken.

It was a strange congregation that I had that day. In front of a knot of Irish, who had drawn off scowling, grinned a colony of tramps who regarded all religions with the impartiality of ignorant indifference, and were looking forward to the service as a change, or, in their own term, 'a lark.' Many a nominal creed, at any rate, because many a country, had, however, its representative or representatives there. Beside a heavy-footed, mild-eyed Essex ploughman crouched a wicked-eyed, lithe Lascar, looking very much like a viper that would spring as soon as it should be quite thawed out of its torpor. There were two Chinamen, who had nothing but their thin blue calico jumpers to keep the keen wind from goose-skinning their lemon-coloured bodies, when again turned out to its tender mercies. Black and brown faces of the negro type blotched the mass of

lighter countenances with round dots like music notes. The large majority of those present belonged, of course, to the British Isles; but the Register showed that amongst my hearers there were natives of every division of the globe—five countries of continental Europe having contributed their quotas, and Africa being represented not only by negroes, but also by a bankrupt Algerine. Amongst the English was a university man, whom drink had brought down to seek, and seek in vain, for labour at the Docks. He was not the only one of the Refuge's inmates whom drink had driven thither; but the proportion of such, though large, was not nearly so large as some might imagine. The circumstances in which they had been born and bred, without any fault of their own, had plainly disqualified the largest proportion from making any efficient fight for life—they were mental and physical weak-

lings. Their moral perceptions, of course, were not very strong either ; but still they seemed to have a sincerely honest wish for work—work that fled them like a tantalizing phantom ; sometimes letting itself be apparently clasped, and then vanishing into thin air. The *look* of the fathers and mothers of this class, and even more pathetically, the look of their poor little bandy-legged, strumously-scarred and swollen, goggle-eyed babies, told a plain story of the conditions of their lives. It was not necessary to consult the doctor's report to learn that they had far more than the average share of the ills to which all flesh is heir. The doctor's 'Rheumatism' *they* would have called 'roomatics ;' they might not have understood what his 'Catarrh,' 'Incipient fever,' &c., meant in words ; but they were terribly familiar with the whole long list in fact. 'Excessive debility from starva-

tion' stood out prominently in the doctor's book, but it was writ far larger on their pinched faces and in the crooked-knee totterings of their lath-like legs. 'Dyspepsy,' I may add, in passing, was one of the few diseases *not* to be found in the Refuge doctor's list. It is a horrible disorder, but from that the poorest of the poor would seem to be exempt. Exercise, change of scene, and simple diet are, I believe, some of the chief items in the regimen prescribed for dyspeptic patients by the faculty. As a rider I would venture to add, let them exercise themselves, change their scene, and simplify their diet by going to see those startling phenomena, their non-dyspeptic countrymen, and relieving their necessities out of their own superfluities. They might thus not only escape from the overbrooding hypochondria that darkens their lives, upon the sunniest day, with the shadow of its fiend-like

wings, but also secure one of the purest of positive pleasures. To visit the sick, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, are A B C duties of Christianity, but they meet with a marvellously rich reward. As if the pleasure which the doing of the deeds gives—supplemented as it is, in very many cases (*maugre* all the talk about the ungrateful mercenariness of the poor), by the lasting earthly love they win for the doer—as if all this were not enough, our Lord has said, ‘Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these little ones, ye have done it unto me.’ The Founder of our religion proudly claimed the common humanity which linked Him with ‘the least.’ How fond we poor little creatures are of fancying ourselves, through merits of our own, of an entirely different species, if not genus, from our fellow-men!

In the Refuge, moreover, there was a large sprinkling of ‘decent folk’—honest,

industrious, skilful working people, who had done well at their trades, until thrown out of work by a sudden cessation of demand for their workmanship. A few of these had grown reckless, and were some of the untidiest and least attentive of my congregation; but most were just the opposite. The husband—no longer, poor fellow, the proud *house-band*—the wife, the children, were all freshened up in their poor little way, and knelt and rose and sat in decorous regularity and rest. Poor things, they looked, even in a Refuge, a little proud to be able to prove their by-gone ‘social superiority’ to the British heathen around them, by showing their familiarity with the Prayer-book; but it must have been sad for them to think of the past Sundays in which they had turned out together for service in their Sunday best.

The voice of the Litany, in one lan-

guage or another, is heard in many lands; but scarcely anywhere can its comprehensive supplications for God's succour, help, and comfort to all that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation—all that are desolate and oppressed—have had a more emphatic point than they had in the Refuge that morning. Even those who had previously been only parroting, the experienced repeaters of the responses, when we came to those wide-hearted prayers, joined in the 'We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord,' with a meaning in their tone which showed that they felt they were praying for themselves. The parrot tone was plainly perceptible again when I had read, 'That it may please thee to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so as in due time we may enjoy them.' Irrational, radically blasphemous, as it was, I could not help feeling that the prayer *there* almost sounded like a taunt.

It was the fourth Sunday in Advent. In reference to both worlds, the refugees, in the words of the Collect for the day, were sore let and hindered in running the race set before them. Inexperienced as I was, I was sorely puzzled as to what I was to say that would give them any comfort, or do them any good. When the prayers were over, I fumbled in the Bible and Prayer-book, and at last read out, almost at desperate random, as my text, the latter part of the Epistle for the day:—‘Be careful for nothing: but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.’

My first extempore sermon was a miserable failure, so far as elocution went; and yet in effect it was not quite a failure. I managed to make some of my hearers be-

lieve—in spite of my stammerings, and sentences that ended abruptly as turned-up rails—that *I* believed in my text, and that they might believe in it too. Again and again I read the text, rolling its easy flow of words and direct meaning, like a sweet morsel, in my mouth. ‘Why not keep on reading it over and over again, until they have got it by heart, and then give the glory and the benediction? what good will your limping “interpretation” of it do?’ I often thought; but still, having stood up to preach a sermon without book I felt compelled to spin out my five-and-twenty minutes in an extempore sermon of some kind. I repeat that it was the sorriest sermon, but still I tried hard to make my hearers understand that it was possible even for them to be careful for nothing, if they sought by prayer with thanksgiving, through Christ Jesus, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding. And my

stuttering efforts, as I have said before, were not entirely vain. There were not many of my hearers who seemed to have any notion of what I had been driving at; but now and then I had seen a nod of satisfaction instead of somnolence, and heard a sigh of incipient resignation—of relief from what had long been a state of chronic hopelessness; and when I was going out at the Refuge door, a carpenter, with a rule-less rule-pocket in his trousers, came up to me and said, ‘I felt lost, sir, when I had to get rid of this’—clapping the empty rule-pocket—‘but now I don’t feel all at sea. Perhaps I may get all my tools back—perhaps I mayn’t; but anyhow you’ve made me feel that there’s a God that squares everything, after all. *He* hasn’t lost his rule. No, sir,’ the man added, in an offended tone, when (I fear, quite as much out of vanity, that had not expected to be gratified, as out of benevolence) I had in-

quired whether there was any one I could speak to about him—‘No, sir; I didn’t come to beg, and I didn’t think you would have thought so. I came to thank you, because you had relieved my feelings. You spoke as if you meant it just now, and I trusted to you to understand me. Of course I should be glad to get work—God knows how glad I should be—but I didn’t come carneying to you to get it. I’m not a say-after-me, sir. I can see you’re young at preaching, sir—I’ve heard real preachers, that can run it out like oil—but if you’ll only try to speak from your heart, as you did just now, you needn’t mind so much that you haven’t got the gift of the gab. People who want a bit of comfort will overlook your failings.’

Before the carpenter came up to me I had had a talk with the matron’s young county-woman, and also a talk with the Cambridge man. In a moral point of view

—in a logical point of view—it is hard to say why we should lavish so much pity on those who have thrown away good chances, and complacently remark of those to whose level the fortunate ones have brought themselves—in the handicap race of life in which, at starting, they were so much favoured—‘Oh! that is only what they were born to.’ But still the feeling is widely-spread, even amongst the most heavily-handicapped. A ‘reduced gentleman’—however guilty he may be of having reduced himself to a lower denomination—finds no more outspoken pitiers than amongst those who have struggled with poverty from their cradles (if they *had* any), and are likely to struggle with it to their graves. This Cambridge man, probably, was the least worthy inmate of the Refuge. Friends, fortune, intellect, a very creditable university career—he had sacrificed all, because, without

any appreciable temptation, beyond a suddenly-acquired liking for it, he had taken to drink. And yet his co-inmates, who had any knowledge of his history, treated him with a compassion which had no contempt in it—they even ‘respected’ him, because his accent and little tricks of manner showed, in spite of the blackguardism in word and deed in which he could indulge, that he had once been a ‘gentleman.’ The ‘feudal system’ may have been cut down, but its roots are not yet grubbed-up, in England. The Cambridge man was far more complimentary than the carpenter. He plastered me with flattery that would have been impudently fulsome, had it not been plain that the unhappy man had been brought by drink and want into an almost fatuous condition. He cried copiously—solemnly assured me that he had made up his mind to reform—and then asked me for the loan of a sove-

reign, to get a box of clothes out of pawn. If he could dress himself decently, he said, he could recover a tutorship at Upper Norwood from which he had absented himself for a week or so. Sovereigns then, as now, were scarce with me—sense (I am afraid) was scarce also—but I could not refuse the sovereign. I thought it might be just the stone that would block his downward rush upon the road to ruin. I promised him that he should have it, if he would call at my lodgings next morning. The issue of that unhappy promise I shall have to relate afterwards.

The girl I have spoken of returned to the women's ward as soon as service was over, and when the matron and I went up, we found her sitting at the end of her bunk, just as she had been sitting the night before. She was in an obstinately sullen mood. The matron tried to get her to talk about their common county. 'I'm

sure you come from Buckinghamshire, my girl,' said the good woman. 'What part is it? Anywhere near Aylesbury way? — perhaps I might know your friends.' 'Friends!' echoed the girl; but in a tone of dreary scorn, that had a terribly lonely sound. 'We all have a Friend,' I answered to the '*I've* got no friends' that tone conveyed—'a Friend who sticketh closer than a brother, if we will but accept His love. Father and mother, every human being we cared for on earth, may forsake us, and yet we need not feel lonely if we can feel that Jesus Christ is our friend.' She shook her head impatiently, as a horse shakes its to get rid of flies—she was plainly weary of all such preaching. 'I never *did* anything to be brought to this,' she cried, half fiercely, 'and yet I'm brought to it—what's the good of talking?' After this she continued so obstinately silent that the

matron's patience gave way. 'You're an ungrateful girl,' she said. 'The parson and me mean you well. You're Buckinghamshire bred, I know, and so you ought to have more respect for the clergy—let alone me, that would do you a good turn if I could see my way clear to it. But if you won't speak, who's to know what to do? You haven't such a lot to help you, I should say, as you can afford to snub them that would.'

The matron would have spared that taunt if she could have foreseen the forlorn look that followed it. That look instantly softened the good woman; but the girl called back the tears that had gushed for a moment into her lonely eyes, and became more stonily silent than before.

'I can't make her out, poor young thing,' said the matron, as we went downstairs. 'A pretty creature she must have been, and might be again, if her face was

filled out a bit. The Buckinghamshire women have a name for their good looks—anyhow, that's what people used to say in my time. It's a pity she's so shut-up, and thinks so much about her rights. If you come to rights, bad's the best with the best of us, ain't it, sir? And it ain't possible for such as us to stand alone, as if we didn't want a bit of help now and then from one another. We're *always* wanting it, proud as we may be. It's like the way the children prop up the cards—knock away one, and down they all come. *Rights*, poor young thing! Those who think so much about their rights are apt to do wrongs to get their rights—rights as they *fancy* 'em. I do believe she'd rather starve *now* than go astray—she's got pride in her. But that can't last for ever, if she *don't* starve meanwhile. I wish she'd open her mind to me. She's Buckinghamshire-born-and-bred, I know, and I mean her well, and did my best to show it.'

VIII.

THE TWIN CROSSING-SWEEPERS.

A CROSSING-SWEEPING in the poor parts of the East End of London is not a very valuable property on week-days. Most of the people who cross the road care little how muddy it is. There are no eccentric old gentlemen in the neighbourhood who pay five-shilling and even golden toll (as used, at any rate, I have heard, to be the case in the West End) when they condescend to pick their way over the crossing; no benevolent old ladies, whose combined pensions give the crossing-sweeper a very

comfortable little income ; no lazy, swellish servants, to hire him with coppers and cold fowl to post letters and call cabs, in order that their own brawny calves may still enjoy a spotless *otium cum dignitate*. Crossing-sweepers, locally practising their profession, are scarce in the parts I speak of on week-days. But on Sundays they make their appearance in front of the churches and the larger chapels just before and after service. The Sunday incumbents of the two crossings that led to one of my churches, were at one time a little boy and a little girl : strikingly alike in features, although the boy looked very feeble, and the girl, in spite of her poor clothing and diet, seemed a merrily healthy young puss. Some of those who had coppers to spare chose the boy's crossing when they came to church, because he looked so weak ; but most gave their pence and halfpence to the girl, because she smiled so brightly and

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brandished her broom with so much cheerful vigour. Both the children were very well-behaved, and poor as their dress was, they managed somehow to make it look tidy. They were not exactly 'pretty children,' but still their faces were very different from the jumble of flat features, lighted only by low cunning, which is the general type of countenance amongst our poor little 'street Arabs.' They differed from the ruck of street children strikingly in another respect. As soon as the single bell had ceased to toll, they left their brooms in a corner of one of the porches, and stole into church, dropping side by side into one of the obscurest free seats. (What a pity it is, by-the-by, that so many of our churches in poor neighbourhoods have only single bells, which clank as monotonously as the factory bells which the dwellers in such places hear every week-day, instead of at once soothing and

cheering them as a Sunday peal of bells soothes and cheers when it rings out like a chorus of angel voices!)

Sunday after Sunday, when I passed the little crossing-sweepers on my way to church, I determined to make inquiries about them, but it so happened that for some weeks they escaped my memory as soon as Sunday had passed. One Sunday morning I missed them from their accustomed post. A bent old man, almost muffled from view in a threadbare, greasy, many-caped drab great-coat, was plying the broom in their stead. I asked him if he could tell me what had become of the children.

‘ Boy’s bad, an’ the gal’s a-nussin’ of him.’

‘ Where do they live ? ’

‘ Them an’ me lodges together in a harch, an’ the gal says to me, “ Fred can’t go, Ginger, an’ I’m agoin’ to stay along

with him to-day—so you take my broom, an' go down to our pitch afore the new church—it's a pity some un shouldn't git the browns." So I've come, but bless ye, sir, I don't mean to keep all I gits. They shall have their whack, as they've a right. You'll please to remember the sweeper, sir?'

I asked him if he would pilot me after service to the singular joint lodging of which he had spoken. 'Ye're not agoin' to blow on us, sir?' he cross-questioned, glancing up sharply. 'Ye see, we've got it rent free, an' though it ain't used for nothin' else, them as the place belongs to might turn us out if they knowed there was any one in it.'

There is a network of railways in the East End now, but at that time the Black-wall—the trains drawn by a rope that ran over wheels—was the only East-End line. In the upper portion of one of its arches,

that had been boarded up for use as a stable and hayloft, but had not been long tenanted in that capacity, the old man and the children resided.

‘I hain’t been there so long as them,’ said the old man, as we walked back together. ‘I’m a finder by trade, if ye can call it a trade—pick up rags, an’ bones, an’ metal, and sich ; an’ one night I come back dead beat, for I ’adn’t had nothin’ to eat, an’ ’adn’t found nothin’ to speak on neither. I sot down by that there railway harch, an’ felt as if I could blubber, hold as I be. It was a good step yet to the place where I was a-lodgin’ then, an’ there wasn’t anythin’ for me to eat when I did git back. Well, jist then up come them two children, wi’ their brooms over their shoulders. They work a City crossin’ a-week days, an’ only come to yourn a-Sundays, ’cos it’s handy like, an’ the City’s empty a-Sundays. “What’s the matter, old man ?” says the

little gal. "I'm tired," says I. "Come in an' 'ave a rest," says she. "That'll be better than settin' out 'ere in the rain." The rain *was* coming down; but I was so tired, I should like to ha' gone to sleep there. So up they took me to the loft where we're all a-lodgin' now; an' when they found out I was 'ungry, they give me some o' their grub. "If you've no objections, I'll turn in 'ere to-night," says I; an' I did. Both on 'em said their prayers, afore *they* turned in. It made me feel ashamed like—I was layin' awake watchin' on 'em. "That's good children," says I. "I'd ha' done it myself, if I 'adn't been so tired; but now I'll say 'em in bed." An' I did say 'em, sir, an' I've gone on saying 'em, an' so has the children. Presently says I, "Would you mind if I was to come an' doss 'ere?" They says "No," an' I says "Good-night, then," an' *they* says "Good-night," and we've lodged together ever

since. Sometimes I helps them, an' sometimes they helps me, accordin' as we've got on. Poor dears, they wouldn't be crossin'-sweepin', if they'd their rights. Their father was a doctor, sir! Don't it sound strange? They don't speak agin' him more than they can 'elp; but I can make out that their father was a bad sort, though he *were* a doctor. He'd 'ave let 'em run wild, if it 'adn't 'a' been for the mother, an' she died afore the father, an' when *he* died, there was nobody to take care on 'em. As I can make out, they was left alone in the house after his buryin' without anything to eat, an' got skeared, an' come out to see what they could do for theirselves. I s'pose it was thought as they'd friends to look after 'em by them as seed to the buryin'—I can make out there was no friends at the buryin', an' I guess the doctor chap had tired out his friends, axin' 'em for money an' sich like. I know

a son o' mine tired out me, or I shouldn't ha' been where I am now, an' I don't expect that doctors an' sich is much different from sich as us when the devil gits a 'old on 'em. Any'ow, them two poor children turned out into the streets—it must be pretty nigh two years ago—they've been where they are goin' on for a year and more—an' in the streets they've got their livin' ever since. The mother must ha' been a good un, whatever the father were. It's wonderful the little wickedness they know, but then, ye see, they keeps themselves *to* themselves—that's why they come to the harch—an' God knows *I* wouldn't lead 'em wrong. It seems 'ard, though, that nothin' can be done for 'em—that it do. Both on 'em can read very pretty. Whenever I see a scrap o' print, I pick it up to keep 'em in practice. Their way o' talk is pretty, too. In course they've picked up some o' the words they've

heard, but they don't say 'em so sarcy as the other children. I don't mind *their* callin' on me Ginger, though who it was fust gave me that name, or what reason they 'ad, *I* can't make out. There ain't much o' ginger about me, as I see. But, law bless ye, sir, I don't mind it from *them*; an' I calls them Fred an' Em'ly, an' we gits on as if we'd knowed one another all our lives.'

'That's *our* harch, sir,' the old man said presently, pointing to one that was secluded, although with houses almost touching it. There was no thoroughfare past it, and no near window gave upon it. The old man opened a door cut out in the stable-gates, and motioned me to enter. In the four corners of one of the stalls lay four little heaps—of dark rags, of comparatively light rags, of bones, and of old metal (the last subdivided into rusty iron and more precious metallic waifs). 'I does

my sortin' down 'ere,' Ginger explained. 'I ought to ha' got rid o' *them* by rights yesterday—there ain't so much on 'em—but I was too tired to stir out when I got back, an' I never does business a-Sundays. I don't call *this* business'—pointing to the broom—'what I've took at the church is for the children. Manners is manners,' he added apologetically, as he pushed before me, when I was about to mount the ladder that led to the loft; 'but they might be skeared if they see you fust.' When he had reached the top of the ladder, I heard a jingling splash of coppers. 'There, I hain't done so bad,' cried Ginger; 'an' what d'ye think? 'ere's your parson come to see you. Come up, sir. Mind how ye come, though. Stretch your foot over them two rungs—they're rotten.'

A little mouldy hay and straw had been left in the loft by the former tenant, and two or three tattered sacks. It is no

exaggeration to say that these were its chief furniture. The articles which the incoming tenants had brought in with them, or subsequently acquired, might all have been put into a not very large carpet-bag. On a hay-and-straw-and-sacking bed lay Fred, with Emily squatted on the floor beside him—arrested by my coming, in the gleeful counting of the vicariously earned coppers which she had commenced. Both the children were rather shy at first, but they soon—Emily especially—got at home with me. What they told me, in reply to my questions, tallied with what I had heard from the old man. They both, however, gave old Ginger more credit than he had given to himself; and though they had plainly no awe of the old fellow, and Emily made open fun of him before me, they seemed to look upon him as a kind of protection. It was touching to see how fond the children were of each other.

Emily wanted to make out that Fred did all their work, and Fred, rousing himself from his sickly languor, startled me by shouting, 'That's a lie. Em's worth two of me.' I had a Testament, and tested Emily's reading powers with it. 'Oh, that *is* nice! I remember all about that,' she cried, when she had finished, very creditably, the dozen verses I had pointed out. 'Ginger's very kind—he always brings us home something to read when he can. There was half a *Lloyd's* he brought home last night, and there's a pretty bit in it about a little girl and a canary and a scarlet geranium; and the canary dies, you know, and the little girl buries him under the scarlet geranium, because he liked to perch on it. Ma used to have a canary, don't you remember, Fred? I read some of that to Fred, but he thought it wasn't Sunday reading, so I picked out this, because it sounded like a

sermon ; but he didn't like it, and I didn't like it. Perhaps we could have made it out better if there had been a head and a tail to it.' She handed me a crumpled, charred tract, which had evidently been twisted up for a pipe-light. Great was Emily's delight when I told her she might keep the Testament. 'We can go over them all now, can't we, Fred ?' she exultingly exclaimed. 'The little children, and the good Samaritan and his donkey, and everything. We used to read them to mamma of a Sunday evening, when papa was out,' she added in explanation.

Whilst we were talking a train rumbled overhead. The reverberations which it caused were new to me ; I could not help giving a little start, and Emily could not help giving a little laugh. 'You behave yourself, Em'ly,' growled Ginger, who felt that he had somehow dropped out of the leading position due to his age. 'It's a

queer sound to them as ain't used to it, an' to them as is. You young uns are snorin' like anything when they goes over at nights, but sometimes I'm a-layin' awake, an' sometimes they wakes me, an' any'ow it ain't pleasant to 'ave that rumble-tumble right over ye—as if the Last Day 'ad come, an' the skies was a-droppin' in. If a train was to come down on ye, ye'd larf on the other side o' yer mouth, Em'ly.'

The children, when asked whether they would not like to make their living in some other way than by crossing-sweeping—some way more congruous with the opportunities which their father seemed to have thrown away for them—were not half so anxious as Ginger was they should be, to avail themselves of the chance of 'bettering themselves' which my words held out. 'We don't do bad,' said Emily, 'when Fred's up, and he'll soon be up again, and we shouldn't like to

be parted, and we're used to Ginger. He isn't such a bad old chap, though he does growl sometimes as if he'd snap your head off.' '*I don't want to get rid on ye,*' retorted Ginger, '*but if ye won't give up crossin'-sweepin', when ye've got the hoffer, ye're sillier than I thought ye was, Em'ly.*'

There was food in the loft, I saw, and money to buy more—such as it was. Fred, moreover, did not seem to be what is called 'dangerously ill.' But those two children getting in love with the hard street life and railway-arch shelter they shared with the old man, who was so fond of them in his grumpy way, clung to my memory long after the little door in the stable-gates had been closed behind me. It might be impossible to help the old man—however much one might wish to give him a helping hand—but surely something might be done for his young fellow-lodgers.

The next day I went to the arch with the clergyman to whom I was giving temporary partial assistance. He remembered the name of the children's father. The 'doctor' I found had been one of those medical men, numerous in poor neighbourhoods, who also keep druggists' shops. My friend also remembered and respected the character of the doctor's wife, and was startled to find that her children had for months been crossing-sweepers in front of his own church. When we mounted the ladder Emily as well as Fred was in the loft. She had raced in from her City crossing to see how he was getting on, and was giving him a drink of water ; looking very scared because he talked so strangely, and stared at her as if he did not know her. The violent cold which he had taken had ended in fever, and the first thing to be done was to get him into the Fever Hospital. I cannot remember now whe-

ther it was the old building or the present one in the Liverpool Road, but I do remember that Ginger used to find time once or twice a week to trudge northwards and sit with his young friend. Whilst her brother was in the hospital my friend took Emily into his own house. He had children of his own, and was, therefore, naturally unwilling that she should visit Fred; but she fretted so that, fearing she would otherwise break away, my friend went with her to the hospital long before he thought it was prudent for her to visit it. No harm came of the visit, but it was not until months had passed that he ventured to tell his wife of it.

Admission into the Orphan Asylum at Clapton was eventually obtained for both the children. The night before they started for their school my friend invited Ginger to take tea with them at the parsonage. Its pill-box parlour was no gilded

saloon, but Ginger looked so aghast at the idea of sitting down on a carpet and in company with two parsons and a parson's wife, that the latter object of his dread considerately proposed that he and his young friends should have their tea alone together in her husband's uncarpeted study. The books it held were not many, but they impressed Ginger with awe. 'Ah,' he half-sighed, 'you won't want me to pick up bits o' print now, *Miss Em'ly* an' *Master Fred*.' When they were bidding their old friend good-bye the children said he must often come and see them at the Asylum. 'No,' answered Ginger. 'They wouldn't let me if I wanted, an' I shouldn't want if they would. You've got your rights, thank God, an' are a-goin' to be brought up respectable, an' I ain't a respectable sort. I shall miss ye both—we got on uncommon well when we was much of a muchness—but, law bless ye, ye'll soon be

ashamed to think ye ever lived with sich as me. I s'pose there ain't no lor, though, agin' my takin' your crossin' of a Sunday if I can git it, an' the gen'lemen 'ere 'ave no objections. I shall be lonesome of a Sunday now with nothin' to do, an' I can go to church all the same, an' it'll seem, some'ow, as if ye 'adn't quite gone up in a balloon like.'

IX.

A SCHOLAR AND A GENTLEMAN.

HALF an hour before the time appointed on Monday morning the Cambridge man I had met at the Refuge called at my lodgings. He was in a very restless condition. His watery eye ceaselessly wandered, as if seeking a hole in which it could hide itself from questioning glances. His trembling hands never stopped twitching and twirling something; his left thumb scratched at the only button left upon his coat, as if it had been a dry splash of mud that he wanted to scrape off. He was plainly in a

great hurry to get the sovereign he had been promised, and then to take his departure immediately. But I wanted to have some talk with him, and therefore persuaded him to stay to breakfast with me. The bit of bread that he had had that morning at the Refuge seemed, however, to have quite satisfied his appetite for food. He merely took a sip of coffee, and then glanced about with the furtive fretfulness, which a man who has sold himself, body and soul, to drink so often shows when he is longing for a spirituous stimulant, and yet does not like to ask for it. His manner made me feel doubtful about him even then, although I still believed that he sincerely desired to reform.

I got him at last to tell me a little of his history, and it was strange to note how much self-conceit there was still left in the miserable man. He bragged about his university career, and almost openly

sneered at me when he found that I had taken my degree without even Junior Optime honours. I learnt then that he was in orders. ‘*I’ve been a London clergyman, too,*’ he said half-boastfully; ‘but mine was a very different kind of life from what yours must be, I fancy. Don’t you find it a bore to have nobody but common people to mix with? But then, of course, if you’ve been used to that sort of thing, it’s different. I don’t suppose I ever had a poor person inside my place—why, the pew-openers made little fortunes. It was a proprietary shop in the West-End, and nice profits the proprietors must have netted until they were fools enough to quarrel with me. There was no peddling parish-work there—blankets and coals, and bed-ridden old paupers, and all that kind of rubbish. Cream of the cream, sir—that’s what *I* had for my congregation.’

According to his own account, *he* was

not to blame for his degradation. Circumstances had combined to pull him down. The chapel-speculators — ‘rank snobs, every one of them, though they *had* the sense to hire a gentleman to “catch the swells,” as they called it’—had unwarrantably interfered with his personal liberty, although he was at the highest tide of his aristocratic popularity, and he had thrown over the chapel in indignant disgust. And then the girl to whom he had been engaged, and of whom he had been, and was still, devotedly fond, had been driven by her friends to put an end to the engagement without a shadow of a shade of reasonable excuse, and he had been tempted now and then to try to raise his spirits from their deep depression first by a little extra wine, and next by an occasional glass of raw brandy, and the habit had insensibly grown upon him, &c., &c. I learnt afterwards that the chapel au-

thorities had not interfered with his 'personal liberty' until it had run to seed in license which seriously menaced his popularity, and consequently their profits; and that the extra wine, &c., had been the cause instead of the consequence of the rupture of the other engagement. After he lost his chapel, St John, as I will call him, had lived for a time on his friends, and when they grew weary of him, he had taken to private pupils. A man of his abilities and attainments might have done well in that line of life, if he could have kept his head cool, and been industrious enough to rub off the rust which was beginning to gather on his classical and mathematical lore; but the life, both morally and mentally, was too exacting for such a man as St John had become. He next turned 'hack-parson;' drinking the proceeds of the occasional services and sermons for which he plied almost as soon

as he had pocketed them. Sometimes he had begun to drink before he mounted the reading-desk or pulpit, and the demand for his services fell off—even in city churches in which six hearers were considered an overflowing congregation. He somehow got appointed chaplain to one of the obscurer cemeteries, but he did not hold the appointment long. *His* version of his dismissal was, that the wet yellow clods piled up round the gaping, roughly-boarded graves, the wet yellow leaves that dropped into them from the dank, dark, overbrooding branches, in the autumn in which he obtained and forfeited his appointment; the ever-tolling chapel-bell, the black groups of sobbing people, the black groups of almost grinning ‘mourners,’ and the utter callousness of all the other cemetery-officials, so weighed upon his already nearly broken spirits, that he could not always command his voice

when he was consigning ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life. Unless that hope *be* sure and certain in the heart of him who utters it, or unless he has hardened himself into looking upon the shovelling in of earth upon the end of a life of hopes and fears (that reached beyond the grave) as carelessly as he might watch the shutting of an empty drawer, I can imagine that a cemetery-chaplain's must be one of the dreariest of lives. But gin is no balm of Gilead for a bruised and wounded heart, and, according to the official account of poor St John's dismissal, he lost his appointment because he was so fond of gin that, before a funeral train could file out of the cemetery gateway—even at the jolting trot which so jars upon the sincere mourners who were drawn into the cemetery at a snail's pace—the chaplain might be seen slipping in at the side-door

of a beetle-browed low public-house, peeping round a corner on the opposite side of the road.

St John, seventh (bracketed) wrangler of his year, had next to stoop to usherships in third-rate classical and commercial academies for young gentlemen. For a time he was a favourite customer with one of the clerical and scholastic agents who, in those days, colonized the Adelphi purlieus of the Strand. *He* had not to stand long in the crowded little outer room, furnished with frayed faded oil-cloth, a tall blistered slate-coloured desk, a lame flabby-cushioned, lanky stool, a set of rusty fire-irons, and a yellow fly-spitten engraving of Louis XVI. mounting the scaffold in his shirt sleeves. The raw boys, and middle-aged failures in other lines, who were waiting to secure their first scholastic engagements; the experienced ushers, who horrified the others, and thought themselves 'fast' be-

cause they spoke slightly of 'governors'—i. e. the men they wanted to hire them without any intention that they *should* govern them; and with the contempt which familiarity had bred of 'Old Nick,' the agent—clashing the rusty fire-irons, in the broadsword exercise, beneath his very nose: all of these queer would-be instructors of English middle-class youth made way for St John to get up to the parlour door when he entered the stifling little outer office. His seventh wranglership had mounted to a senior wranglership in their mythology. As soon as he was aware of St John's presence, 'Old Nick' would glide in with a cat-like step, and, grinning like a big-headed, purring, old tabby tom cat (I am quoting St John in my description of the agency), would beckon to him to enter the more luxuriously furnished chamber set apart for the 'principals,' who paid the agent nothing. There, at first,

St John was eagerly snapped up by underbred, half-educated, or totally-uneducated men, who jumped at the chance of getting a distinguished university man—in orders, too—cheap for their ‘establishments.’ The examiner, whom ‘Old Nick’ kept to make a pretence of examining other aspirants in Cæsar, Greek Testament, the Anabasis, and Simple Equations, never dreamt, of course, of tasting and testing St John’s quality. The schoolmasters talked bumpuously about the ‘first desk’ of which he was to be the incumbent, and of the ‘clerical duty’ which their influence would procure for him in their parishes; but still they seemed half afraid of the phoenix they had caught. But the phoenix soon moulted, without getting brighter feathers, in the schoolmasters’ opinion. He made himself such an insufferable nuisance that time after time he came back upon ‘Old Nick’s’ hands. At first the agent had no

objection—there was another five-shillings registration-fee to pocket, and another five-percentage on the next year's salary, a quarter's advance of which (although it was never earned) St John and the agent always stipulated for. But St John came back *too* often: and the agent, for the sake of his 'connection,' was obliged to give him the cold shoulder. He tried other agents, and ran a still shorter course with them.

After that he went utterly 'to the dogs.' For months he had been 'living anyhow.' The story he had told me about the Upper Norwood tutorship—in spite of the precise name, address, and directions which way I was to turn, if I wished to verify his statements, that he gave me—proved to be a tissue of plausibly barefaced falsehoods. He confessed that he had tried to earn 2s. 6d. a day at the docks, and was very indignant at the thought that he had not

been able to earn it, after stooping to seek for it ; but he made out that such extremity was merely an exceptional, instead of being, as I found afterwards, a normal result of his 'weakness.' However he might disguise it, it was a very sad story that St John told me. There was a maudlin pathos, a maudlin humour, a maudlin cynicism in it, that were almost equally distressing to listen to. When he spoke of his lost love, he wept a drunkard's maudlin tears, and cursed her with a drunkard's maudlin oaths. 'She might have done anything with me, but she chose to marry some one else,' he said, as if he thought that she had done herself as well as him a great injury in refusing to link their lots in life—and then he swore, and then he cried, and then he glanced slyly at me, to see whether he was impressing me, or 'committing himself' in my opinion. It was a doleful exhibition of unstrung character, but I still clung

to the belief that he wished to make another effort to struggle out of the slough in which he had defiled himself, and might succeed if he obtained a helping hand. So meanly mixed are our motives, that I am afraid I derived a little ignoble pride from the thought that, after all, a high wrangler had been forced to appeal for assistance to undistinguished me. He pulled out a greasy, dirty, crumpled *fasciculus* of pawn-tickets to convince me of the truth of his story about the box whose detention prevented him from resuming his Upper Norwood tutorship, and then, when he saw that he had been believed without the duplicates' testimony, whined for 'another sov.' to take him down 'and so on,' when he had recovered his box. He offered to leave with me the whole bundle of his pawn-tickets as security for the double loan. 'The things would cover it a hundred times over, if you took them out of pledge,' he

boasted—immediately adding, when he noticed that the proffer had brought, for the first time, his pecuniary honour into doubt, ‘That’s only my joke, you know.’ ‘You shall have it again in a week’s time, with many thanks,’ he said, as he slipped the money into a waistcoat-pocket, the lining of which dropped it out upon the floor. ‘All right,’ laughed St John, as he stooped to pick up the rolling coin. ‘I’ll come in more presentable togs next time. I’m sure I’m very much obliged. I’ll often call, and we’ll have a chat together about the old place—Cambridge, I mean—I think we shall get on together, old fellow,’ he added, patronizingly, as he left the house.

A few days afterwards he called again, as wretchedly dressed as before, and once more full of alternating penitence and pride. He had only taken one glass, he said, on his road to the pawnbroker’s, but it had upset him, and whilst he was uncon-

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scious his pocket had been picked. Did I doubt his word? No gentleman disputed another gentleman's honour simply because he was unfortunate. He was bitterly sorry that he had yielded to the temptation, but he had felt faint for want of a stimulant, and could solemnly assure me that he had only taken one glass. Would I lend him one more sovereign just to get his box out of pawn? He could manage then, he thought, without troubling me further, and would ask for an advance the instant he got to Upper Norwood—his word was not doubted there—they would only be too glad to get him back—some people appreciated him still—and remit by P.O. order.

It was plain enough how the money had gone. The wretched man was just on the verge of *delirium tremens*. Of course I did not lend the third sovereign, but as I had heard that for a man in such a state total deprivation of drink was as dangerous as

unlimited indulgence in it, I got him a little weak brandy and water. He tossed it off, and grew a little calmer. I persuaded him to sit down, and tried hard to discover some way of being useful to him. At last I remembered a friend whose charity was large enough to give even such an unpromising applicant employment, and went into my bed-room to get my desk to write to this friend. When I returned, St John was stealing back from the chiffoniere with the brandy-bottle in his hand. Before I could get to him he had filled his tumbler with unwatered cognac, and before I could dash the glass out of his grasp, he had swallowed more than three parts of its fiery contents. He abused me for my stinginess when I locked up the brandy-bottle, and almost immediately afterwards rushed away declaring that I had deceived him, and that he deeply regretted that he had stooped to make such a fellow the

recipient of his confidences. Twice again he called; the first time looking more like a walking corpse than a living man, and the second time so ferociously intoxicated that I was compelled to call in the police. It was a dismal sight to see that wreck of good looks, good chances, who had once been the darling of a lovely, good girl's heart, borne away to the station-house strapped down upon a stretcher—it was horrible to hear the fiendish imprecations which his foaming mouth howled out.

When he was released from confinement I made one more effort to save him; but it proved utterly useless. He was joined to his bestial idols, and I was forced to let him alone. Drink, obtained anyhow, was the only thing on earth he seemed to care for. 'Don't talk shop to me,' he answered fiercely, when I reminded him of the judgment to come. 'I'm up to the

tricks of the trade; and I made a precious sight better thing of it than you ever will, old fellow !’

About a year after my last interview with him, my eye fell on the following paragraph in a newspaper :—

‘ FOUND DEAD. — A miserable object, well known to the police, was yesterday found dead in one of the new houses that are being built near Hackney Wick. A workman, on mounting the scaffolding in the morning, found the corpse lying half in, half outside, an unfinished window. The board that had been fastened to the ladder to prevent boys from climbing up it had been removed, no doubt by the deceased. The previous night, as our readers will remember, was one of the severest of the season, and the luckless outcast had succumbed to the inclemency of the weather. His clothing was of the most de-

plorable description, and the body in a frightful state of filth and emaciation. Incredible as it may sound, it is said that the deceased was well-connected, and at one time the idol of the aristocratic congregation of a West-End Proprietary Chapel, of which he was the incumbent. A yellow old letter, in a lady's hand, but almost illegible from dirt and tattered creases, was found in the breast pocket of what it sounds like satire to call the deceased's coat, containing a lock of hair, tied with what seems to have been once blue ribbon, and addressed to the Rev. F. St John, B.A., at some number in South Audley Street, so far as we could decipher the direction. "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*" is a maxim that we would gladly follow; but in the interests of truth, and to hold up a warning to others who may be tempted to throw away similar opportunities, it is our painful duty to add that the Rev. F. St

John, B.A., had been committed as "drunk and incapable" and "drunk and disorderly" no less than 187 times. The body was removed to the Hackney Dead-house, and the inquest is to take place to-day. It is not probable that any of his former associates will be anxious to identify the corpse of the unhappy man. "Sic transit gloria mundi."

That was poor St John's end, and the penny-a-liner had made the most of it, and read over his account again, no doubt, with great complacency when he had made the round of the offices that had accepted his 'flimsy,' and was dining off the proceeds in a Shoe Lane tavern.

But if, seated amongst her children, opposite her husband, the giver of that lock of hair, the writer of that letter—kept back when the doleful return of correspondence on both sides took place, and

kept to the last—if she, I say, happened to read that melancholy ‘In Memoriam,’ perchance even poor St John found one genuine mourner, however heartily she might love her husband and her children, and thank God for her escape.

The pharisaical feeling of thankfulness that I had never been tempted to sin like that ‘luckless outcast,’ to borrow the penny-a-liner’s contemptuously compassionate phrase, which arose within me when I read the miserable news, received a sudden check. ‘Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall’ tolled in my heart like a wind-stirred bell.

X.

[A BIRD-CATCHER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.]

MR JONES was as temperate as poor St John was prone to drink. Although the proprietor still showed crustiness at times, I liked to look in at the bird-shop every now and then. There was an honest crispness in Mr Jones's talk that acted on me like a wholesome tonic. 'Much good his fine friends an' learnin' did him, after all,' said Mr Jones one day, when we had been talking of St John's death. 'But he's dead, poor beggar, and only a cowardly sneak would fling mud at a dead

man. You may depend upon it that gal's hair he'd got was to blame—but he should have been a man and got over it. That's what I had to do.'

There was something very piquant in the idea of Mr Jones's having had a 'love affair,' and I wiled him into an autobiography. 'It's the gal, I know, you want to hear about,' he said with a knowing wink. 'But I ain't a-goin' to say how I was a fool, without showin' how I come to be one. I'll begin at the beginning, if that's what you're drivin' at.

'This shop belonged to my uncle—mother's brother—afore I got it. I suppose it was hangin' about here, when I was quite a little un, that first gave me a taste for birds. Uncle didn't mind my comin', though he wouldn't speak to mother. She hadn't pleased him by her marriage—father was a nightman, and, what's worse, he was a drunken scamp.

He used to thrash poor mother, and blacken her poor eyes. No, I don't suppose she was a beauty, because folks used to say I was the picture of her, but she was beautiful to me because she was al'ays so fond of me, an' I used to want to grow big enough to hit father back so as to hurt him. Little as I was, I'd pitch into him. Sometimes he'd laugh, and say, "Jack's a chip o' the old block;" an' sometimes he'd fetch me a awful clout, or give me a kick with his great heavy boots that pretty nigh broke my bones. That was accordin' to the mood he was in an' the drink he'd had. When he was very good-tempered, he'd take me to the public with him, an' make me tipsy for a lark. Yes, beer, and gin, too, he used to give me. "Now then, Jack, open your tatur-trap an' have some Jacky," he'd say, an' the other men would laugh when they see me reelin' about. Once there was a man,

though, that knocked the glass out of father's hand when he was giving me the gin. "If you're a beast," says the man, "don't make that poor little kid one." He an' father had a fight then, an' the t'other man licked. After that father could never get me into a public—I'd cut away like a scalded cat when he wanted to get hold of me. I'd never really liked the burnin' stuff, for it used to make me sick, but you see, I'd thought it game to drink it—as if I was a man like—till the chap that said I shouldn't have it gave father a hidin'. I'm thankful to say I've never touched spirits since, an' it ain't often that I take a glass o' beer. Not that there's any harm in that, if people would only take it in moderation, an' could get it genuine, instead of soakin' theirselves wi' gallons o' doctored stuff. When I was seven or eight, as I reckon, poor mother died; an' a week or two after that father

ran away. When I got back in the evening to the room we had, "Dad's cut his stick, Jack," the other folks said, "you'd best go to your rich uncle." Sure enough father was off, and everything in the room he'd taken. There was only the dust left like there is in a holler nut. When I got to the shop here, uncle was puttin' up his shutters. He was very grumpy at first, an' said it wasn't his business to keep other men's kids. But at last he said I might come in for the night, an' he'd see what was to be done about me in the mornin'. However, I stayed on with him after that for two years an' more. He pretty well made me earn my grub an' my clothes, an' neither was first-rate. However, he taught me to read an' to write, an' to cipher a bit, an' ever so many years after he left me his business, because he hadn't nobody else to leave it to; so I won't say anythin' against him.'

‘ Well, to be honest, Mr Jones, I don’t see that you have much reason to.’

‘ P’r’aps not, sir, but, as you may suppose, there wasn’t much love lost between us. He was al’ays snappish with me. So I took to the birds an’ things, an’ made friends o’ them. You can’t get on, I fancy, without somethin’ to be fond on. Uncle had a natural history book or two, an’ I read ’em on the sly, an’ that made me fonder than ever o’ the birds, an’ o’ the country too, though I’d never seen any—not real country, I mean. When the ketchers came to sell their birds to uncle, I al’ays got a talk with them if I could, an’ I thought there couldn’t be a pleasanter life than theirs was. There was one young feller who didn’t go in so much for birds as for the nestes, an’ he got hedgehogs, an’ ferns, an’ primrose roots, an’ such things at odd times. He mostly sold for hisself in the streets, but now an’ then he’d

bring things to the shops. Well, this young feller said I might come with him for a day, if I could get leave. I knew 'twas no use askin' leave, so I took it. I undid the back-door, an' climbed over the back-wall, where the young feller was waitin' for me. Grimes Street wasn't built in then as it is now. We'd to start a good bit before the sun was up. The streets were so quiet they seemed quite strange. It made you jump like to hear a church clock strike, an' then we got out on the country roads, an' the sun come up, an' the birds began to sing—the larks was singin' afore he come up—an' there was nothin' but hedges, an' trees, an' fields—I'd never felt half so jolly.'

'Which way were you going?'

'We got down somewhere out by On-gar, an' had a snack an' a snooze on a old haystack, an' then we worked across country. We turned up all the quiet little

lanes that seemed to lead to nowhere, and scrambled through hedges, an' climbed up trees, and cut across medders. I could scarce believe I was the same lad I was the day afore. I felt just as if I'd died, an' woke up in heaven, or fairyland, or somewhere. The country was so fresh and clean, an' the dew-drops was on the spiders' webs, and there was no end o' wild-flowers everywhere. People talk as if Essex wasn't much, but I never saw such a sight o' wild-flowers in any other county I've worked, an' I've worked 'em all round London. Everythin' was so quiet, too, except the birds an' the insects, an' the wind a-rustlin' in the leaves. You could hear a cart a mile off. We got a lot o' nestes—leastways, my pal did, for I wasn't much hand at findin' 'em then. We couldn't take home half we come across. We got a cuckoo's egg, I remember—but we got all kinds o' eggs, of all

sorts, an' sizes, an' colours. I was new to the work then, an' they were as good to me as guineas in a purse when I see the smooth, spotted things snugglin' in the moss. We had a bit o' bread an' cheese for dinner in a old churchyard with fields all round, an' the old church seemed made o' nestes. There was ivy all over it that was capital to hold by, an' we got out on the top o' the tower, for the door was ajar, an' so we went in. The pews were all white-washed, I remember, an' the air inside seemed as if it was dead like. In that old church we got owls' eggs an' martins', an' jays', an jackdaws', an' starlingses'. An' we climbed up the elms in the churchyard, an' got some rooks' eggs. We came so sudden upon a clutch o' pa'tridge-eggs in some young corn that I smashed three on 'em. I can remember it just as if it was yesterday. Of course, I was goin' to grab 'em at once, but my

mate said, "See, if there isn't a keeper a-lookin'," an' then he whipped 'em up. "Them as I sell 'em to won't ax me how I come by 'em," says he, "an' you shall go halves." That made me understand that it was somehow stealin', but I couldn't make out why we hadn't as much right to take them as the t'others, an' I can't make it out yet.'

'But it was poaching.'

'I don't care what ye call it—wild birds' eggs *is* wild birds' eggs. It's diff'rent no doubt with pheasants when a man breeds 'em an' feeds 'em just like fowls, an' they're almost as tame to be shot, but I can't make out how pa'tridges in a field can be any man's property any more than the larks t'other side o' the furrow. I got a fine weltin' from uncle when I got back the day after for leavin' the door unlocked an' him to do everythin', but that didn't keep me from slippin' out agin. The young

feller I went with used to give me some o' what he got for what we took, and, of course, I had no objection, but it wasn't that that made me go. I liked the free life, an' gettin' to see the birds an' that in their own homes. When I'd seen 'em there, it was twice as nice to read about 'em.'

'But you couldn't find birds' nests all the year round.'

'That's a fact I'm fully aware on, sir. Besides birdnestin', I used to go rushin' an' root-gatherin', an' Christmasin', an' ketchin' hedgehogs and squirrels, an' snails an' frogs for the birds an' the Frenchfolk, an' snakes, an' effets, an' all kinds o' things, with that young feller. Sometimes one o' the bird-ketchers would take me out with him. At last uncle got tired o' weltin' me, and o' me too. "You're no good to me, Jack," says he, "an' I don't think you'll ever do any good for yourself. I'd ha'

brought you up respectable if you'd ha' let me, though my sister was a fool to marry that blackguard father o' yours, but you wouldn't let me. So now, as you've made up your mind to be a wagabone, I'll have nothin' more to do with you, 'cept to start you with a bird-net, an' buy your birds, when you've any worth buyin', just as I would of any other feller." He did give me a decent net that he'd bought second-hand, and a real capital call-bird out of his shop, and a stuffed bird or two like them I've got on the twigs there, for decoys, an' a trifle o' tin, and then he called me a ungrateful young scamp because I looked so jolly. I felt set up, you see, an' all the time I was at it I managed to make a livin' out o' the bird-ketchin', more or less, though sometimes it was a good bit less than more, though that wasn't often.'

'How do you catch the birds, Mr Jones?'

‘Why, at odd times I’d go out at night with a mate or two an’ ketch with a net an’ a lantern. You beat the hedges, you see, and then the birds fly at the lantern like moths to a candle, an’ you fold the net over ’em. But I used to like nettin’ by day best, all by myself. I caught more, an’ they was all my own, an’ then I wasn’t bothered with other people’s talk. I’d buy a book from time to time, an’ I read a deal in those days, an’ had time to think o’ what I read, an’ the things about me, an’ other things, too. Sometimes I wished I couldn’t think—it bothered me, when I might ha’ been so jolly else, lyin’ on the hot grass, with everythin’ so sweet about me. At times though I wouldn’t bother myself, but just enjoy myself, doin’ nothin’ except smoke my pipe, whilst I was waitin’ for the birds to light. I’d look at the blue sky an’ the green trees, as they call ’em, though when you’re used to look at trees,

lots of 'em ain't green, but all kind o' colours that wouldn't be believed if they was put in a pictur'. Cowper says—

“No tree in all the grove but has its charms,
Though each its hue peculiar ;”

an' then agin—

“The sycamore, capricious in attire,
Now green, now tawny, and, ere autumn yet
Have changed the woods, in scarlet honours bright.”’

‘ You seem to be fond of Cowper ? ’

‘ Yes, I was very fond o’ Cowper in those days—not o’ the preachy bits, but the bits about the country. I don’t like the preachy bits—they sound so narrer like for a man as must ha’ loved natur’ as he did—any journeyman parson could ha’ done that kind o’ thing as well, it seems to me.’

‘ Don’t be rude, Mr Jones, and don’t run down your favourite poet because you don’t like parsons. Cowper helped you to enjoy the country.’

‘ Yes, I used to enjoy myself in those days when I didn’t bother myself wi’ thinkin’. I’ve read o’ somebody that could tell what tree each was by the sound the wind made in the leaves. I can’t quite believe that, but it’s wonderful what a wariety there is in the wind—on a summer day, too, when it seems half asleep. An’ then there was the corn a-springin’, an’ the wood-pigeons cooin’ as if they was gettin’ their little uns off to sleep, an’ the cows standin’ up to their knees in the ponds, or up to their bellies in the grass that looked coolin’er than the muddy ponds, an’ watchin’ me through the hedges wi’ their great brown eyes, as if they couldn’t just make me out, but it wasn’t worth botherin’ their heads much about such as me. Did you ever notice the way cows look at you, sir—as if you was a bad riddle? There’s other things does the same, an’ yet we talk about bein’ lords o’ the creation

an' all that. I should like to hear the opinions o' what we call the "inferior animals" about us—it wouldn't be very flatterin', I expect. Why, there was I, couldn't ketch the little birds, without gettin' little birds to help me. It seems mean somehow, don't it, sir? Sometimes I'd turn over an' try to get a half a foot or so of grass off by heart—every blade an' flower an' leaf an' everythin'. *You* do that, sir, an' then you try another an' see the diff'rences, an' then you remember what lots o' diff'rences there is in one acre o' turf, and what millions o' diff'rences there must be in the world, let alone the stars, an' you won't think much o' your knowledge, however wise you'd fancied yourself afore. You'd feel as if you'd got a knock on the head that had made you stupid like, an' it wasn't much use learnin' anythin' when there's such a lot behind that you can't learn. When I reads in the papers

about the "deplorable ignorance of thousands even in this enlightened age," I can't help thinkin' that the paper chaps are givin' theirselves airs about precious little. *Their* knowledge will never get 'em down and worry 'em, I reckon. They've got their books to run to, when they don't know about a thing; but that ain't knowledge, to my thinkin', an' if they'd got in their heads everythin' that was ever writ in a book since the world was, they'd ha' got hold o' a pack o' lies, I guess, an' if it was all true, it 'ud be nothin' to what hadn't been writ about. But it was other kinds o' things that used to bother me, as well as things o' that kind—what I read in the Bible, an' heard now an' then at church, and so on. One Sunday mornin' when I was goin' out ketchin', I come across a man who was givin' tracks to them he met, and puttin' 'em down here an' there wi' stones on 'em.'

‘Wasn’t he better employed than you were?’

‘No, sir, I don’t believe he was, and so I tell you plainly. I could ketch, but he couldn’t. He didn’t give any to them as were anyways well-dressed, though they weren’t going to church any more than those he did give ’em to. That seemed comical—as if a man would be sure to go to heaven if he’d got a good coat. That kind o’ thing ain’t good policy. “You are afraid to interfere wi’ them as are well off, but you fancy you may lecture me—I mayn’t take my liberty because I ain’t respectable”—that’s how a poor man thinks. I read the track I got when I was lyin’ watchin’ for the birds. I could hear some church bells ever so far off, an’, thinks I, “now I’ll have my sermon.” I needn’t tell you, sir, that I don’t believe that we oughtn’t to do any work on Sundays because the Jews didn’t use to do any work

on Saturdays, but I do think it would be a good thing if we could get a rest once a week, an' time to think about somethin' besides grub an' money.'

'And yet you keep your shop open on Sundays.'

'Yes, I know I keep my shop open a-Sundays, but sometimes I wish I didn't. I don't profess to be more consistent in some things than them that call themselves Christians. Well, but about this track. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" was at the head of it, and it made out that heaven was like a go-to-meetin' Sunday, and that those who didn't keep Sunday like the go-to-meetin'ers would be damned for a certainty. I'd felt I might ha' been doin' better than ketchin' birds on Sunday, but talk like that wasn't likely to do me any good. "If that's heaven," I said, "I'd rather not go there." Besides, the track made God out to be as savage as

a beadle that takes a pleasure in wallopin' naughty boys; an' that seemed downright blasphemy to me—I'd got a better notion o' God than that out o' the quiet fields, I thought, though I had sometimes ketched birds in 'em a-Sundays. I couldn't ha' said "Our Father" agin, if God was such as that. I used to say that for a prayer in those days, and, though I don't say it now, I try to feel it, an' leave Him to provide for me without my dictatin' to Him. So I tore the track up an' sent it flyin', an' the bits scared away as fine a pull o' birds as I ever see. I couldn't help laughin' when I thought how the very folks that would ha' blamed me for bird-ketchin' on Sunday would ha' said that that was a judgment on me for tearin' up the track. I often got into such a tangle in my thinkin' that I was downright glad I'd to work for my livin'. I might doubt sometimes whether such as me was much worth keepin' alive,

but still I didn't feel inclined to starve, so there was somethin' I couldn't make a question about. "You look to your net," I'd say, when I'd been moonin', "or things will be very taper."'

'But you seem to have done well?'

'Yes, I made a very fairish livin'. I sold to uncle, an' to the shops Spitalfields way, an' round about the Dials, an' sometimes I sold on my own account. I got orders, an' trained magpies an' such at home, an' made a very good thing of it. When I grew to be a young man, I'd two decent rooms; one for me, an' one for the birds. I'd begun to get some decent sticks, too, for—now I'm comin' to it—I'd been fool enough to fall in love. There was a very good-lookin' gal—a market-gardener's daughter—that I'd often seen when I was out Hounslow way. She was a touch above me then, of course, but I licked a tramp that was

rude to her, an' so I got to speak to her, an' after that she shammed to be very fond of me. She was the kind o' gal that liked to be admired all round. She wouldn't have minded the tramp kissin' her, I do believe, if he hadn't been quite so rough. That's the sex all over, sir—there isn't much to choose between 'em. I found out afterwards that she'd had no end o' sweet-hearts, but, of course, I didn't know that then. She'd talk to me quite kind when I went down when I'd spruced myself up, an' she led me on to believe that she'd have me after a bit, if I could get ever such a mite of a shop. She was uncommon fond of me, she said, but "bird-ketcher's wife" didn't sound respectable. That's the sex all over, too—they may talk about lovin' on ye, but they look precious sharp after bein' respectable an' havin' somethin' to keep it up on, too. It's all bosh the stuff they talk in tales an' poetry about gals breakin'

their hearts for poor young men, an' being fonder than ever o' their husbands when they've come to grief. I don't believe a word of it. If a man's getting on in the world, an' his wife's got spendin' money, she'll make a deal of him; but when he ain't gettin' on, won't she nag him! I'm precious glad now I was never married—to be vallied just accordin' to what was outside of me. An' that's woman's love.'

'Foul calumny, Mr Jones. A sensible man like you ought to be ashamed to talk such rubbish.'

'Of course, *you* won't believe it—or you'll sham not to. It's part o' your trade to make out that women are all angels. Anyhow, that ain't my opinion. Men ain't much to boast of, but they ain't half as selfish as women. But I was fool enough to be dreadful cut up when I went down to tell Fanny that I saw my way to a little shop, an' then to hear that she'd married

the new butcher. You see, she'd led me on to believe that she was almost as fond of me as I was of her, an' I'd been workin' double tides to get some kind of a home for her, an' I was all alone in the world, 'cept for uncle, an' he didn't count, an' I'd been thinkin' that it would be nice to have some one that was my own, an' that liked to be. However, it was all for the best. The chap she married was better-lookin' than me, I suppose, though that ain't sayin' much; an' he was more respectable then, though Fanny would be glad enough to be my wife now, I'll go bail, for they soon made a smash of it. After that disappoint'ment I grew fonder than ever o' my own company. At first I was out of heart, an' thought I'd let things go with a run. But that seemed silly to me then, an' it seems a deal sillier now. A man must be a poor sort that knocks off work because he can't get a gal to have him—it's just like a

babby settin' down to cry because it can't catch a butterfly. An' yet it ain't pleasant to find out that fallin' in love 's all a hum-bug, too—that them you fancied wasn't worth it, an', whether they was worth or not, that you can forget all about 'em after a bit, though you thought you was goin' to love 'em for ever, as you might about a dinner you couldn't get years an' years ago. It makes you more an' more inclined to doubt about everythin', an' I didn't want any teachin' o' that sort. However, I took all the more to my books, an' the birds, an' the country, after Fanny had jilted me; though it was a goodish bit before I went Hounslow way agin. Where we'd used to meet mostly was at the bottom of her father's garden, where there was cabbages an' such like growin' between the apple-trees. I'd pretty well got over the business by next spring, but when I went down an' see the trees in blossom,

an' her not waitin' for me under 'em, it all come back upon me for a minute as bad as at first. You would'nt ha' thought that such a old bear as me could ever ha' felt like that, would you, sir? It makes me laugh to think of it now.'

'I am only sorry that you did not fall in with a more faithful sweetheart. You would be happier, and you would certainly speak more politely of women, if you had a good wife of your own now.'

'Well, as I was sayin', I went back to the bird-ketchin', an' I should ha' been at it now, if uncle hadn't died, an' left me his lease an' his stock. The fust week I was a shopkeeper the change carried me through, but before the second week was out I was downright pinin' for a free life agin. As soon as I'd got the shutters up on Sunday afternoon, I was off into the country, an' it seemed to say, "Oh, here you are agin, old feller! Where have you

been this long while?" I was so pleased to smell the fresh scents agin, that I stayed out till it was time for me to get back to take the shutters down on Monday. And since then, when I could get any one as I could trust to mind the shop, I've often taken the nets an' gone out for a day's ketchin' a week-days. It was more of a treat, an' yet, after all, it wasn't as nice as it used to be, if you can understand that, sir. I seemed to be only makin' believe to be free, for I couldn't help thinkin' o' the shop every now an' then—it was like a bird flutterin' about with a string tied to its leg. You'd ha' thought that a chap that had led my life would ha' been glad to have a good home to go to; but it wasn't so with me. I used to feel dumpish when I got back. I never felt reg'lar at home here till I got Black Pete. The neighbours didn't take to me, an' I didn't take to them. I lived like a sulky bear in

a holler tree, except that the birds an' that wasn't afraid o' me. Poor old Pete! He's the best o' company. He understands all that I wants him to understand, an' he does all I wants him to do as if he liked it, an' he never bothers me with any jaw. Sometimes when I want to be quiet, an' the little feller, as is only nateral, don't, I half wish that me an' Pete had the house to ourselves agin. An' yet he's a dear bright little feller, is Fred. Now I've got used to him, I couldn't get on without him. There's another thing, too. Though I don't think much o' women, there was somethin' in that poor young mother o' his, when I see her lyin' dead, that seemed out o' the common — somethin' so pure like in her face, an' as if all her life she'd been thinkin' of others instead of herself, poor young thing. It's pleasant to fancy that, after such a life as she had, I can make her a bit happy by takin' care of her

boy. I ain't superstitious, an' yet I often feel as if she was in the room a-watchin' of him. I've often felt it when I've gone to have a look at him in his little bed, afore I turn in. It don't scare me a bit—except to make me anxiously to do right by the little feller. It wouldn't, not if she was to show herself. To have such a ghost as her in the house would be a holy kind o' hauntin'. Not that I believe in ghostes—but then you can't help havin' your fancies; and when they're pleasant, and don't do you no harm, why shouldn't ye? '

XI.

LIFE THROUGH DEATH.

THE bird-catcher for years had contented himself with picking holes in other people's beliefs. He fancied that he was perfectly impartial—that he was an honestly sceptical truth-seeker. In fact, however, he was strongly prejudiced against any form of faith that had found expression in historical symbols. What he did *not* believe he could easily tell you: what he *did* believe it was a harder matter to find out.

But a time came when this pseudo-sus-

pension of judgment altogether ceased to satisfy. He experienced a great sorrow, and then he longed for a definite creed. It was the death of Black Pete that brought about this change. The outcast whom he had sheltered richly repaid him for his kindness by opening a door of escape from the bleak atmosphere of the 'Everlasting No.' Pete had only a tobacco-stopper of his own carving to leave his master, so far as this world's goods went, but he indirectly left him the priceless legacy of faith in Christ. For a fortnight the wind was in the east—'nailed' there, in sailors' phrase. The old negro had been for some time failing, and seemed visibly to shrivel up as hour after hour, day after day, that pitiless east wind still blew.

Rus in urbe was green all the year round, but its plants looked almost as 'perished' as poor Pete during those two bleak, sunless weeks. In spite of a good

fire and sandbags, and the other little comforts which Mr Jones provided for his retainer, Pete had a benumbed look. All day long he crouched over the parlour fire, only noticing his master and little Fred, the fire, and the birds and the plants. When the doctor felt his pulse he paid no attention to him: as soon as the black wrist was released from the white fingers the arm fell like a log. Next to his master and Fred, and one of the canaries that used to entangle its claws in his grey wool, I had been Pete's favourite, but he no longer gave me a white-toothed grin of greeting when I went in. The only thing that seemed to rouse him in the least was when he saw his master or Fred doing anything that had formed part of his duty. Then he would give a feeble look of protest, but he had not energy enough even to attempt to carry his protest into action.

I had often requested the bird-seller to act as interpreter between me and the negro in a conversation on matters of faith. I was altogether at a loss to determine what he knew of spiritual things. He came to church in the morning with Fred, and was very anxious to imitate as closely as possible the uprisings and downsittings of the rest of the congregation ; but, of course, this was nothing to go by.

Hitherto, however, Mr Jones had obstinately refused to aid me. He said that he did not know how to put my questions, and that if he did he would not put them. What would be the good, he asked, of confusing the man's mind ? At present, he added, Pete was in the enviable condition of having nothing but the direct light of nature to guide him—he had never been perplexed by the cross-lights of other man-made creeds. ' If he'd got your catechism at his fingers' ends, an' knew what it was

all about, instead of rattling it off *on* his fingers' ends, as I've seen some dumb folk have been taught to do, just like the gabbling youngsters that can talk do with their tongues, could Pete have done his duty better than he has done it, poor old chap? Did you ever see a kinder, willinger old soul? No, sir, you leave him alone. You couldn't do him any good, as I see. You'd on'y bother him'—so Mr Jones had been in the habit of answering me. But I felt very anxious about the negro's state. He was plainly soon about to die. It was my duty to prepare him for death; but how was I to set about it? He had become so weak, seemed so much easier when he could feel the fire, and see the foliage and the birds, that his gruff, kind old master had made up a bed on the sofa in the parlour. He had not been able to rise from it on the last day I saw him, although it was afternoon when I called. The bleak wea-

ther had broken up ; a west wind that felt balmy even in Grimes Street was blowing, and even in Grimes Street the calm autumn sun was shining brightly. The bird-seller's recently moping prisoners were hopping and chirping with renewed liveliness ; but Black Pete was lying on the bed more languid than ever, looking at the dying fire with a lack-lustre eye. Little Fred was sitting beside him on the sofa, stroking his face and holding his hand. Mr Jones went into the room with me, and at last I prevailed upon him to try to discover what were the thoughts about the next world of the poor fellow who had passed through this one so pathetically isolated.

The bird-seller took from the shelves that held his little library, Young's 'Night Thoughts,' and pointed to an engraving of a churchyard. He closed Pete's eyes, and placed his arms straight by his sides ; then he opened his eyes, pointing to an open

grave in the illustration, and going through a pantomime of digging a grave in the floor, lowering a corpse into it, and filling it up, and patting down the clods. Poor Pete was puzzled at first, but presently he pointed interrogatively to himself. When he received an affirmative nod in answer, he nodded too ; but the only sign of fear he showed was to draw little Fred closer to him. His master next pointed upwards, but this only made the negro glance at the birds' cages, as if he was afraid that, unwittingly, he had allowed a bird to escape. He then tried to rise from the bed, as if he had been requested to get up. His master gently laid him down again, and took his hand. When he was quieted, Mr Jones pointed to the bed, to himself, the boy, myself, the birds, the beasts, the plants, the sky ; and then spreading out his arms slowly gathered them in again, as a token of the Universal Love. A light of pleasure


danced for a moment in the negro's eyes—he seemed to have got a sudden glimpse of the divine truth which glorified the grotesque face and figure of its expounder; but then Poor Pete grew puzzled again, and pointed fearfully at the floor, meanwhile clutching the boy more closely, and spasmodically jerking his chin upwards to invite his master to come nearer to him. To re-assure him, and at the same time guide him, the stingy, pet-loving ‘infidel’ opened the window, and liberated his pet thrush; again pointing to the sky as it flew away. The would-be cynical old bird-seller had tears in his eyes when he saw the effect this had on the dying man. I left poor Pete clinging lovingly to his two friends.

When I called next day, three of the shop-shutters were up. ‘He’s gone, sir,’ said Mr Jones; ‘as good a feller as ever breathed, though he was a black; and if

there's a next world, he's happy in it, or he ought to be, sacrament or no sacrament; and we'll say no more about it. If you want to do any good, see if you can cheer up Fred a bit. He's worse cut up than he was about his mother.'

It was because the bird-seller could not trust himself to talk about his old friend that he dismissed me so abruptly. I found Fred in the kitchen, with smeared face and swollen eyes, but he had already sobbed away the keenest anguish of his grief. Whilst I sat talking with him of heaven, and of Poor Pete, through God's mercy, admitted to it—no longer deaf and dumb, but able to hear and join in the angels' song of praise, the kitchen-door opened, and Mr Jones came in and seated himself by the fire. 'You'll think I'm growin' childish, sir,' he said, 'but I should like to hear what you're telling the boy. When those you really cared for are gone, it's

dreary not to feel sure of a heaven. You can't bear to think that they've gone out like sparks on tinder—that they'll never come out o' the blackness again. And it seems cruel on'y to fancy 'em hoverin' about somewheres you don't know where—instead of housin' 'em for ever in a happy home. Poor old Pete! He did care for me! What d'ye think, sir? He gave me this just afore he died. He hadn't had time quite to finish it, but he'd been workin' at it up to the time he was took so bad. He must ha' seen that I had lost mine, an' so he was a-workin' away at this for me. Ain't it curious the pattern he took? It's the cross a-top the church clock-case on the parlour mankleshelf. I'll never part with it, not while I live, I won't '—and as he spoke, Mr Jones, to the astonishment of Fred, sobbed aloud. I could not, of course, help seeing the incongruity between poor Pete's model and the purpose to which his



workmanship was to be applied, and yet, in spite of that incongruity, there was something hopefully ominous in his last little gift.

When he had mastered his voice, Mr Jones asked—‘Would you like to see him, sir?’

We all three went up-stairs, little Fred clinging to me in terror when we entered the parlour. *Rus in urbe* was very different from an ordinary chamber of death. It was filled with a cheerful twitter instead of a brooding sepulchral hush. ‘He liked the birds when he was alive, though he couldn’t hear ’em, an’ they can’t disturb him now,’ Mr Jones remarked half apologetically. Then he reverently lifted up the white cloth, and we saw the face of the poor black, with a sweet smile upon it that made the sable features beautiful.

‘Kiss him, Fred,’ said Mr Jones almost sternly, as the frightened little fellow held

back; 'poor Pete was a good friend to you. Of course you'll bury him, sir,' he said to me. 'Pete had a likin' for you, though he never heard a word you said.'

I did bury Pete, on a mild autumn afternoon; the red and yellow leaves falling as noiselessly as snow-flakes, and a robin singing its soft little hymn on the headstone of a neighbouring grave. Mr Jones and Fred were the only mourners. The old man started when I came to that triumphal burst in the lesson,—'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump (for the trumpet shall sound), and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruption shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought

to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’

When, too, we were walking away from poor Pete’s last bed, the bird-catcher was muttering to himself, from the last collect, ‘that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Him, as our hope is that our brother doth.’ ‘It’s a beautiful service, that of yours, sir, right or wrong; it soothes you about them as are gone, and yet it makes you think about yourself, too.’

Next Sunday morning Mr Jones was at church with Fred. Sunday after Sunday passed, but the bird-catcher’s shop continued closed, and he continued to come to church. ‘Of course, I must come to look after the little un, now poor black Pete is gone,’ he said, when I expressed my pleasure.

But a strange change had come over Mr Jones. He had taken to reading his New Testament, no longer captiously, but as a man weary of a dusty road might put his lips to water running over a mossy stone. He had ceased to carp at any 'professional' remark which I might make, but he said very little to me about his readings, and I said very little to him. He was daily growing more and more intimate with Christ—Jesus of Nazareth speaking by words and works—and words of mine, I thought, would merely blur the impress which the Divine character was manifestly making even on the stubborn material of the bird-catcher's mind.

I do not mean to say that the bird-catcher suddenly became gentle in all his words and ways, and charitable in all his modes of thought. In spite of the goodness there was in it, his was a cross-grained nature; and plane and polish as he might,

the gnarled knots could still be seen. But, from the time of Black Pete's death, it was evident that he had adopted a new rule of life, and was striving with loving laboriousness to live up to it. He still said tart things now and then, but he no longer plumed himself on his cleverness in saying them. His neighbours ere long noticed the alteration in him. 'Well, sir,' said one of my parishioners to me, 'if I'd been axed, I should ha' said, beggin' your pardon, that you was a deal too soft-like to get round old Jones, but, blest if you hain't converted him, or else he's a-turnin' soft hisself.' It was nothing which I had said, however, that had produced the change in the bird-catcher; and so far from 'turning soft,' he had learnt the first lesson of real sanity—that man can only obtain peace by recognizing with humble gratitude his relation to a pardoning, succouring God.

‘Grandfather says his prayers now,’ Fred told me one day with astonished delight. The fact that grandfather did not say his prayers had long perplexed Fred’s mind, and pained his heart. The old man was so clever, in Fred’s eyes, and so kind, and yet he did not do the thing which Fred’s poor dead mamma had taught him nobody could be ‘good’ without doing.

I repeated the remark to the old man, as a likely introduction to a little confidential conversation.

‘Well, sir,’ he exclaimed half-fiercely, ‘it’s nothing to be ashamed on as I knows of. *Ashamed!*’ he added, in an altered tone. ‘Well, *that’s* sensible! It’s made me feel more at rest-like than I’ve felt for many a year, an’ here I am a-talkin’ as if I was ashamed of it. What stuck-up beggars we are—don’t like to be under an obligation even to God A’mighty. Well, sir, I’ll tell you all about it now. I was

fond o' readin', as I've told you, sir, when I was a young man, an' I tried hard to read myself into believin' in Christianity. I got a Paley's "Evidences" second-hand in Goswell Street, an' I read it through. But then, you see, I couldn't remember it all, an' so what was the good? What I couldn't remember was like rungs out of the middle of a ladder. I warn't no nearer to the top with them gone. So I got tired of tryin' to carry Paley's book about in my head. I wanted to feel as the Bible was true just as I see the sky was blue—that don't want no provin'. Well, sir, I got all at sea. I thought it was silly to pray, because if God knew everything, and could do everything, an' was the kind God the parsons made out, it worn't only silly, but stuck-up, to tell Him what I wanted to happen to me—as if I knew better than He did. But when poor Black Pete died, I felt uncommon lonely, and somehow I

took to readin' the New Testament agin, to see if I could get a bit o' comfort. And I did take it on trust to begin with—least-ways, I wasn't al'ays lookin' out for reasons to doubt it—and it seemed quite different. I've got to believe there was a Jesus o' Nazareth as sure as I see you there with your umbrella, an' I've got to love Him, too, an' to want to do what He tells me. *He* says "pray," an' so I do pray—the prayer He taught them as was with Him. And it's wonderful what a help it is to me, sir, to try to do His will. I ain't a amiable sort, sir, you know, but when you say "Our Father," you can't help thinkin' that them even as worries you most must be your brothers an' sisters; an' then you want to behave accordin'.'

XII.

BESSIE'S PARISH.

‘THE wildest colts make the best horses,’ said Themistocles, ‘if they only get properly broken in,’ and wild little Creases, very soon after she had been lured into it, became one of the best scholars in our Sunday-school. A good many of the children, like Bessie, went to no other school, and therefore we had a great deal of *a, b, ab, b, a, ba* work to get through—most necessary under the circumstances, but generally rather distasteful to both teachers and taught. Bessie, however, revelled in the dry, rhyming columns, and

rang their changes backwards and forwards as merrily as if they had been a peal of bells, as soon as she had learnt her letters. 'You look out, Fred—I'm a-ketchin' of ye up fast,' she exclaimed proudly to her young friend and fellow-pupil, the bird-seller's *protégé*, when she was promoted to words of one syllable in sentences. And although Fred, thanks to his mother's care, read remarkably well for a child of his age, Bessie's was no vain boast. It was not long before she was Fred's class-fellow. She threw her whole heart into what she was about. So long as she supposed that 'learning the markets' was all that she needed to learn she devoted herself entirely to that study; but now that she had arrived at the conclusion that there were other things in the world worth learning, she learnt those other things with an equal ardour. Whatever she took in hand, she pulled at with a will, as the sea-phrase goes. As soon as she

had picked up our chants and psalm-tunes, her voice, not only in the school-room, but in the church also, rose above all others—sweetly shrill. We were in the habit of singing the Old Version Psalm, in which these somewhat quaint, tautological, ungrammatical, but still stirring lines occur :—

‘On cherubs and on cherubims
Full royally he rode ;
And on the wings of mighty winds
Came flying all abroad.’

The tune had something of the irresistible motion of a march in it, and that and the alliterative music of the second and third lines, between them, quite carried Bessie away. For some seconds after the rest of the congregation had finished the line, her ‘ro—o—o—i—ode’ could be heard ringing up in the rafters.

The variety of characters over whom our Blessed Lord exercised, so to speak, a magnetic influence during his life on earth is one of the most striking facts in his

earthly history. The doctors in the Temple and the Baptist in the desert, Peter and Pilate, Mary of Magdala, and Joseph of Arimathæa—those who agreed in scarcely anything else agreed in recognizing in their various ways the divinely exceptional personality of Christ. And throughout all the centuries during which Christ's life has been read, that marvellously many-sided influence has continued to act. Every one who reads this must be able to count up people by the score who have scarcely anything in common except a reverential love of Jesus of Nazareth. Social circumstances, dispositions, tastes, modes of thought, may seem to have dug impassable gulfs between the sharers of that love, but *that* makes them feel akin. It was curiously interesting to note the gradual way in which the character of Christ exercised its attraction on the little London street girl. At first she greatly preferred the Old Testament to

the New. There was 'a deal more fun an' fightin'' in it, she said. The story of Samson and the foxes greatly took her fancy. 'Worn't that a knowin' game?' was her admiring comment on it. The trick by which Michal saved her husband's life was another exploit which made Bessie chuckle in a very infectiously indecorous manner; and she gloated over accounts of pitched battles and single combats. Owing to the bellicosity which her street-life had bred in her, the gentle forgivingness of the Saviour was to her at starting a disagreeable puzzle. She liked him for 'goin' about doctorin' poor folks, an' givin' 'em bread an' fish when they was hungry,' but, according to her original notions of nobility of character, it was cowardly not to resent an injury or 'take your own part,' and therefore the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount perplexed her sorely, and she was utterly at a loss to understand why

Peter was told to put back his sword into his sheath. ‘*He’d* ha’ fought, anyhow, if he’d been let, though they did all on ’em cut away arterwards,’ remarked Bessie, trying in vain to make her newly-acquired belief that all which Jesus did *must* be right, tally with her old faith in the manliness of fighting. The first time she read the fifth of St Matthew, she had a stiff argument with her teacher over ‘Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.’

‘It can’t mean *that*, I know,’ exclaimed Bessie, decidedly. ‘Do it, teacher?’

‘It means what it says—it’s in the Bible, and that’s enough,’ answered the teacher.

An unsympathizing appeal to authority of this kind, as a settler, or rather silencer, of moral difficulties, does not, however, satisfy children, any more than it satisfies adults. It is far more likely to weaken

the weight of the appealed-to authority in the estimation of those who are morally muddled. Bessie was not to be so put down. I have no doubt that she half became a little infidel—fancied that, after all, the Bible could not be true, if it taught things like *that*.

‘But, teacher,’ she persisted, ‘if anybody was to fetch ye a clout a-one side o’ yer face, would you let ’em give ye a clout a-t’other? Ketch *me* a-bein’ sich a soft. I’d do all I knew to give it to ’em back agin.’

But, as the months went by, Bessie’s character underwent a very striking change. She was as self-reliant a little body as ever, but self (with half-grudged sacrifice to Granny) was no longer the centre of her little system of the universe. One Sunday morning, when she had been at the Sunday-school about two years, and I had happened to look in just as the chil-

dren were filing off for morning service, Bessie stepped out of rank, and walked up to me with great *aplomb*, and yet manifestly in great distress. She waited until she had seen the backs of the last scholar and teacher, and then explained her trouble. (In spite of her readiness in reading, and the near approach to correctness which the purifying and enriching influence of music gave her 'vocalization' when she sang, Bessie's spoken English, down to the last day I saw her, was very nearly as hetero-epic, and syntax-defying as on the morning we spent together on the Monument.) 'If you please, sir,' she said, 'I want to do some good, but I don't know how. *He* was al'ays a-goin' about doin' some good to somebody, but I don't do no good to nobody, though I goes about pretty much. I'm workin' walnuts now, and how's ye to do any good to anybody out o' *them*? 'Cept

ye give 'em away, an' then how's Granny to live—let alone me ? '

'Don't despise the walnuts, Bessie,' I answered, 'if they help you to earn an honest living. Whilst you are getting that you are doing your duty so far—just as much as when you come to church. If people were to come to church all day long, and leave other people to work for them and their wives and children, that would be laziness, and not religion. Besides, Bessie, 'doing good' doesn't mean *giving* only. That is one way, and a very good way when people give away what they really have a right to give, and take care that the people who have no right to get it *don't* get it. But there are scores of ways in which you can do good, though you haven't a penny to spare. If you only want to find them out, you're sure to find them out. Just look about you when

you get back to Granny's. Charity begins at home, you know. It isn't doing good to make a great fuss about people out of doors, and then go home and sulk or be lazy. I don't mean *you*, Bessie. I don't think *you* sulk, and I'm sure *you* are not lazy. But if you look about perhaps you'll find that there is something you could do to make Granny more comfortable or happier in her mind, and when you have tried to do that, there are the other people in the Rents—the children and the grown-up people, too. You might do something for them. But I cannot talk to you any longer now. I ought to have been in the vestry five minutes ago. Some day this week I will come to the Rents, and we will consult together then.'

When I called at Mrs Jude's I found that Bessie had very speedily acted on my hints. The floor had been scrubbed; the mantel-piece was no longer furred with

dust. A little bunch of wall-flowers stood on it in an old medicine-bottle. The scanty crockery of the establishment was all clean, and arranged along the mantel-shelf. The window had been cleaned, too, and the few articles of furniture tidied up in some way. The battered flat candlestick had been rubbed until it shone like polished silver. Bessie, who was sitting at her grandmother's knee with a book on her lap, glanced proudly at this last proof of her industry, as it gleamed in the evening sunlight, flanked on both sides with the clean crockery.

‘Why, Mrs Jude,’ I exclaimed, ‘you look quite smart.’ The old woman was evidently pleased with the altered appearance of her abode, but, of course, she could not refrain from grumbling. ‘Humph!’ she answered, ‘I don’t know what’s come to the gal. She come home from school last Sunday, an’ says she, “Granny, how

can I make ye comfor'bler an' 'appier in your mind?" "Well," says I, "I should be comfor'bler if I'd things a bit more like what they used to was afore your father treated me so bad, an' left me with a great gal like you on my 'ands." "How was that?" says she. So I told her about the nice furnitur' I used to have—real mahogany, sir—an' sich like. "Can't we do summat with what we've got, Granny?" says she. "Stuff an' nonsense, child," says I, "in a mucky hole like this." "Well, Granny," says she, "I'll do what I can if you'll tell me how." An' so she went on botherin' till somehow, between us, we *have* made the place look a bit more Christian-like, I won't deny. But Bessie must needs clean the winder, though I told her not, an' so there we've got another broken pane as if we hadn't got enough afore. Spendin' her money, too, on them flowers for the mankle-shelf!'

‘They didn’t cost nuffink, Granny,’ Bessie objected. ‘Jim Greenham give ’em to me.’

‘An’ if ye can git flowers give to ye, why didn’t ye never bring me none afore?’

‘Why, Granny, I used to think they’d choke like in here,’ answered Bessie; ‘but now I’ll bring ye some whenever I git the chance. I *do* like flowers. They make ye feel somehow, when ye smell ’em, an’ they look at ye, as if ye could be good somewheres or other. An’ there’s about flowers in the Testament, Granny—in the very chapter I was a-readin’ when you come up, sir.’

‘I didn’t hear about no flowers,’ growled Mrs Jude.

‘Becos, ye see, I was on’y jist a-comin’ to it. Here ’tis, Granny—“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and

yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory] was not arrayed like one of these.”’

‘ Well, sir, I don’t deny that that do sound pretty,’ said Mrs Jude, in a condescending tone—as if she thought that courtesy compelled her to compliment the New Testament in the presence of a clergyman. ‘ But what I should like to know is how we’re to foller what she was a-readin’ jist afore—about not takin’ no thought for your wittles and your clothes. I’d heared it many a time afore you read it, Bessie, but it was your readin’ of it that brought it to my mind. We ain’t fowls as flies in the air, or flowers as grows in a garding.’

‘ You’d look comikle a-flyin’ in the air or a-growin’ in a garding, Granny,’ laughed Bessie, who had not lost her liking for looking at the ludicrous side of things. The old woman’s temper was ruffled by

her grand-daughter's irreverent conceit, and she paid very divided attention to the explanation I tried to give her of her difficulty. So I contented myself with reading the whole of the latter part of the chapter to her, that it might teach its own lesson—a plan which I have often found to be efficacious under similar circumstances. Except in so far as it removes difficulties caused by differences of time and place, or gives a passing hint that enables one's hearers to make a personal use of circumstances that seem at first things that can have nothing to do with *them*, the less exposition is mixed up with the reading of the Scriptures in the houses of the poor the better, I think. The mere reading of a chapter may, I know, be made as mechanical an operation as the twirling of a 'praying cylinder,' on the part both of the reader and the hearer; but when the reading is not a perfunctory

performance of official duty, the words have often a marvellous power of explaining themselves for purposes of edification. Mrs Jude echoed the last sentence of the chapter, and gave also, without knowing it, Jeremy Taylor's comment on the text.* 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' she said. 'Ah, that it be. I'm tired to the very tips o' my finger nails. You never knew what it was to ache all over in your lines an' every one o' your j'int's—you never stood at a wash-tub, sir—so it's easy talkin'. But I won't deny that I can't rest my legs to-night by thinkin' how tired they'll be to-morrer, an' day after. I mayn't be alive to-morrer. I can't last long, slavin' as I do, an' then, when you've lost me, you'll know how good I've been to you, Bessie. But I won't deny, sir,

* 'Sufficient, but not intolerable. But if we look abroad, and bring into one day's thoughts the evil of many, certain and uncertain, what will be and what will never be, our load will be as intolerable as it is unreasonable.'

that you must ha' took pains wi' her readin', an' I've no objection to her readin' to me agin. Now we've done up the place a bit, you can sit down in a bit o' comfort, an' it's a beautiful book to listen to, I won't deny; though it do make ye feel that ye ought to be somehow as ye ain't. But there's myst'ries none of us knows the rights on, wise as we may think ourselves, I guess.'

In spite of the parting shot at myself, I could see that Bessie had made a very good beginning on Granny. The clearing up of their room—although Bessie had been the chief agent in the joint-stock operation of which Mrs Jude (except in the case of the broken window) claimed the chief credit—led to greater personal cleanliness and tidiness in both. The reading of the Bible at home led to Mrs Jude's being prevailed upon to go to church again, although her church-going

was only very slightly profitable to her in a pecuniary point of view.

She never became what is called 'a cheerful Christian,' but I believe that, in a genuine sense, she did at last become a Christian. She learnt to feel the saving power of the Divinity manifested in Christ—to know that she *ought*, at any rate, to think little of herself, and to strive hard, and pray hard, for the curbing of her unchristian temper, and the cultivation of a more Christian character.

Bessie's missionary work amongst her neighbours was not quite so judiciously begun. The brave little body went about reproving sin of all kinds like a little Nathan, with a considerable infusion of the small Pharisee, and the sinners would not 'stand her cheek.' Bessie was very proud at first of the persecution she had provoked, but when she found that no good came of it, she adopted a quieter tone. When I

think that any one is actuated by a good motive—which can have been given only by the good God ' (to use what is a pleonasm in English), I am very reluctant to interfere with the modes of action to which that motive urges, simply because they do not tally with my own idiosyncrasy. But I suggested to Bessie that only the Sinless Man had a right to speak to sinning men and women as if He did not share their sinfulness, and that that was a stand-point which He did not take. Bessie's quiet work succeeded far better than her Bonerges business. She became more carefully anxious than she had been before to make her conduct harmonize in little things—which, as a rule, because they are always turning up for notice, are really great things—with the principles she professed. She conquered the prejudices entertained against her by the young folks of the Rents very speedily. As soon

as she 'larked' with them, in an innocent way, again, she was so good a hand at larking that she secured us sundry even of the least likely of her boy and girl neighbours as pupils for our Sunday-school. She used to introduce the half-scared, half-saucy, shock-headed tatterdemalions with 'Here's another, sir'—much as if she had lugged in a ragged, restive colt from the marshes by the bur-buttoned mane.

That she ever did much amongst the adults of the Rents, I cannot say, but she did something. After a time they ceased to snub her and swear at her. They even recovered a good deal of the kindly feeling they had entertained towards her before she had taken to being 'a saint.' With a difference, however. They felt that she was no longer 'their sort,' and though they could not help owing to themselves that it was *she* who had risen by the change, the necessity of being obliged to


make such a confession even to themselves somewhat chilled their friendly feeling for little Bessie. She proved herself such a willing, helpful little body, however, in the way of fetching water, running to the chandler's, nursing babies that must otherwise have been tossed about in the Rents' gutter very much like its cabbage-stalks, at odd times of her very scanty leisure, that two or three of the Rents' women who had very large families, came to church now and then out of gratitude to her. It was partly genuine gratitude, looking back upon the past. Bessie had helped them, and so they wanted to please her by going to a place to which she said they ought to go. But it was partly also, I must own, the prospective gratitude which cynical cleverness has defined. 'I was at church yisterday arternoon, so you'll come an' nuss my Johnny, won't ye, Bessie?' is a specimen of the appeals that were often

made to my little lay assistant. She was greatly amused when I called the Rents her 'parish.' 'Anyhow,' she said, slyly, 'there's people in the Rents that'll let *me* talk to 'em, as wouldn't let a parson inside their places—let alone a missionary. Why, Big Sam's wife—he's the fightin' sweep, you know, sir—pitched a missionary into the dust cart, an' she said she'd serve you jist the same; but I said she shouldn't—not if I was by to help ye.'

One of Bessie's parishioners was of a very different type from any I have as yet referred to: an old apple-woman who 'pitched' just outside the mouth of the Rents. Bessie ran evening errands for her, and sometimes kept her stall for her when the old woman wanted to go home for a little time. When rheumatism laid the poor old body up, Bessie looked in before she started on her rounds, to light her old friend's fire for her, and make her as

comfortable as she could for the day. As soon as weary little Bessie got back from her rounds, she looked in again on Mrs Reynolds—thereby making Mrs Jude feel very jealous, in spite of her hard struggles to think that it was all right that Bessie should do so when she knew (as was always the case when she did it) that her Granny was not ‘ailing more than ordinary.’ Mrs Reynolds was a widow, without a soul in the world to care for her but Bessie; and she doted on Bessie accordingly. She was a very simple-minded woman, strictly honest, and willing to ‘do anybody a good turn,’ in her little way; but so far as any definite belief about God’s government of the world was concerned, her mind was a blank sheet when Bessie first took her in charge. Her heart, nevertheless, was half-consciously thirsting for something that would make life a more satisfying thing than merely giving fair

ha'porths of apples in a muddy street. However fair she might make them, she did not feel comfortable when she got home at night. She wanted something to make her feel at peace, though what it was she could not tell. She found out soon after Bessie had begun to read the New Testament to her. 'Lor, sir,' said the old woman to me once, 'that little gal's been next door to a hangel o' light to me. Afore she come an' read to me, I knew I wasn't as good as I might be, but I comforted myself wi' thinkin' I was as good as my neighbours. But there she read about him as called hisself the chiefest o' sinners, arter all he'd done—an' what had I done like him? I was awful scared at first, but then she'd read to me about Jesus, too, an' she talked to me about Jesus in a surprisin' manner for a little gal like her. So now I try to do the best I can, and I just trust to Jesus for the rest.'



Systematic theologians might, perhaps, object to this creed of Mrs Reynolds's, but under the circumstances I did not see that I could improve upon it at present by shaping it into more regular form.

XIII.

CROWDED OUT.

WHEN trade is brisk at the East-End—when ‘works’ are going, docks and ship-yards full, and shopkeepers are rejoicing at the raised wages that tinkle into their tills like summer-rain after drought—our East-End poor-rates are still startlingly high. We have a mass of people who are very slightly benefited by these seasons of plenty. Then as at other times there is a fierce struggle at the docks to catch the eye of the officials who engage the gangs of chance labourers. The motley pro-

letariat—one of the most melancholy sights in London—that musters for hire outside the dock-gates may be a little more hopeful than usual, but scores of them have still to depart unhired. The stimulated demand for their kind of labour cannot absorb its terribly abundant supply, and to the overstocked classes just a shade above the desperate destitution of casual dock-labourers—those whose callings require an infinitesimal amount of skill—the prosperous season that enables the single skilled workman ‘to live like a fighting-cock,’ or, if he be a sensible man, to make a comfortable little pile at the Savings-Bank for the wife that is to be, also brings almost infinitesimal advantage. The Free Trade which prevented corn from mounting to famine-prices is the only kind of change in trade which comes home to these classes ; and to the memory, persons, and principles of those who brought about

the great change referred to, thousands of these classes—more grateful than a selfish section of their skilled brethren—continue staunchly loyal. A shower of prosperity in the East-End, I repeat, only refreshes the fringes of very considerable fractions of its population. If this is the case when the tree is green, what must it be when the tree is dry?—when there suddenly comes a ‘depression of trade,’ followed by dreary years of ‘dulness’? Rate-payers, who dread the workhouse for themselves, have their rentals burdened with a poor-rate supplement of as many shillings in the pound as West-End parishioners have to pay pence, whilst at the same time they lose a considerable portion of their custom, and a considerable portion of what they retain is carried on upon a system of long credit, which is often really tantamount to alms-giving.

I have witnessed so many of these

seasons of depression that one is apt to run into another in my memory. I cannot, therefore, give the exact date of the circumstances I am about to relate, as they are jotted down on loose leaves in my Diary, dated only with the names of the day of the week. I might give many cases of distress as deep, but I have notes of no other that so fully bears out a fixed belief of mine in reference to the sufferings of the poor.

Some of the loudest complainers against 'luck' are those who have most manifestly brought their misfortunes on themselves, and yet they will talk as if they were injured innocents whom Fate took a malicious delight in persecuting. But, nevertheless, no one can have a wide acquaintance amongst strugglers without having met with indisputable cases of want of success that is not traceable to personal demerit—laziness, insobriety, and so forth. 'Go to,

ye are idle, ye are drunken,' is no fair answer when such people complain—although, generally speaking, they are the last to complain. It is of a case of this kind that I have now to tell. It was not until they were at their worst that I became acquainted with the disabled bread-winners, but it will be better to give their history in chronological order.

Sam Phillips, a sturdy, steady young fellow, with an arm almost as bulgy above the elbow as his father's—the blacksmith of the Essex village from which he came—had work in an iron-foundry in one of the Essex towns. It was not a large concern; but Sam had regular work, and though the wages were not high, they were better to marry on than the higher wages of London foundries, since in that quiet little town a comfortable little cottage, with a garden, could be got for less rent than a workman has to pay for a single cramped room in

London. On one of these cottages Sam had his eye, and was fast laying up money to furnish it, and provide a nest-egg for future savings. Some of the other men, who were fonder of beer than of domestic happiness, used to sneer at the regularity with which he trotted off to the Savings-Bank on pay-day. They sneered at him, too, for being a 'meetin'er;' but (as I gathered from his wife) they were afraid to molest him, because, though Sam was no brawler, he had a 'biceps' which they thought even a 'saint' might be tempted to bring into pugilistic play if too hotly provoked. The lass he had selected for his wife lived in his native village. They had 'sweethearted' ever since they went to the Sunday-school of the village 'meeting' together, and 'kept company' formally as soon as Sam arrived at the dignity of wage-earning manhood. The blacksmith was a deacon and the chief

trustee of the meeting-house, and had brought Sam up in a holy horror of 'steeple houses.' The town in which Sam worked is studded with old churches, but Sam never entered one of them. In very bad weather, he went to the Round Meeting in the town: on other Sundays, he walked over to the square little village meeting-house. The division of the sexes—which now-a-days is looked upon as a sign of Romanistic tendencies—was strictly enforced there; but though Sam rather grudged being separated from his Polly, on the one day he could spend with her, during three long services, he found time in the intervals for plenty of Sabbatically decorous love-making. So far as the love-affair was concerned, everything went smoothly. The day for the wedding had been fixed; Polly had come to town one market-day, and gone round to 'look at the shops,' and advise Sam

as to the things he was to buy for the cottage, which was almost 'taken.' Sam was a proud man when he helped her into the carrier's cart that Saturday evening at the Old Swan, in whose tap-room some of his foundry mates were boozing. 'She's a better penny's worth than beer,' was what his face said, as he looked round at them, after Polly had let him give her a parting kiss upon the cart-step. She was going to be married to him in a fortnight, she thought, and so she was not going to be ashamed of her 'young man.' On the other hand, she was very proud to be helped in so respectfully by such a fine-looking, well-dressed young fellow.

But the very next day, after morning service, Sam heard news that damped his hopes. The blacksmith owed money on behalf of the chapel which he could not pay, but which was instantly demanded. If earnest were not paid at once, and good

hope held out of the payment of the rest, either he would be sold up, or else the chapel would be seized and converted into a barn. Sam would not hear of either contingency—he had money in the bank, he could save more—and the consequence was that his marriage was deferred for nearly four years. As the young people sat in the suggestively sundering chapel, I fancy that neither was quite so fond of it as they had been before, but Sam used to say, ‘Jacob served long for Rachel, Polly;’ and Polly used to say, ‘I shouldn’t care how long we waited, if I was only sure that we should come together at last, Sam.’ But the ‘at last’ came when they were, after all, still young people. The furniture was not so plentiful, the nest-egg was not so large, as they would have been if the young couple had been married at the time originally fixed, but they spent a very happy year in their cottage, and their first

baby, according to the mother's account, was finer, prettier, and more handsomely dressed than any of the nineteen baptized along with it at the Round Meeting.

But baby had not been baptized a fortnight before Sam's master failed. The one or two other foundries in the town were still smaller concerns, quite unable to engage a single hand thrown out of work. Sam had to move with his little family to London. The proceeds of the sale of his furniture and the small savings of his year of married life—savingly as they were expended—were exhausted before he found work here. He came in fagged and starving one night to a starving wife feeding a hungry baby from a shrivelled breast. 'It's no good, Polly,' he groaned; 'I've tried all round, but there's no work going. I wouldn't care so much if it was only myself, but there's you and the little un!' And Sam drooped his head between his hands,

and his no longer brawny arms upon his shaking thighs, and fairly burst out crying. 'We must turn out to-morrow—the woman says so, and then what's to become of you and the little un!' Whatever may be the depth of their own restrained distress, there *are* good women in the world who when they see their husbands—once strong men—brought down to crying, think that their sorrow stands far more in need of comfort than their own, and feign a hope which self-reliant man generally is far readier to feel, and express a genuine faith in God's goodness under all circumstances which the best men, when their pride is humbled, often have to force. Polly put down the baby hastily yet carefully on the bed, and sat down on Sam's knee, and put her arms round his neck, as she used to do in the old courting times.

'Cheer up, Sam, old dear,' she said as she kissed him. 'I'd rather have you as

you are than Tim Dakins that wanted to have me. You're twice the man he is, though he have got a bit o' money. You'll buy me a goold watch and a di'mond ring yet long afore he could ha' done. Let's kneel down now, Sam, and say our prayers. God's always good, whatever seems bad. There, you take hold of baby's hand, and pray for us all, Sam.' When he rose from his knees, Sam was a different man, and, seeing the change in his mood, his wife went on—' And now we'll all go to bed, Sam, and I'll tell ye what I'll do in the mornin'. I'll ask Mrs Saunders to give ye a breakfast on tick, as they calls it here, to strengthen ye up a bit, and then you go out again, and see if you don't come back and tell me that you've got something to do.' 'It shan't be for want of trying if I don't,' said Sam. 'It's a come-down for a man that has a trade, and knows it, to have to turn his hand to anything. But

anything I'd do, if I could only get it to do—I'd hold horses or sweep a crossing.'

'Oh, you won't have to sweep a crossin', Sam,' answered Polly. 'There, give baby a kiss, God bless him, and then we'll go to sleep.'

Three weeks' rent being overdue to her, Mrs Saunders grumbled a little when Polly proffered her request in the morning. But the old woman had a kind of respect for her lodgers, on account of the regularity with which they had paid their rent whilst their money lasted, and their generally decent behaviour.

'I don't doubt that ye'd pay it if ye could, Mrs Phillips,—that and the rest that's owin', which is ill-convenient to me, as has to pay, whoever don't pay me,' said the landlady. 'But I ain't a-goin' to charge for a bit o' grub, to give a honest man a chance o' gittin' his own livin': an' if it's *reg'lar*, I hope you'll stay on, for

'cept about the rent I hain't no fault to find, whatsumdever, Mrs Phillips. An' I'll send *you* up some breakfast too, poor thing. You look as if you could git inside of a gas-pipe, an' well you may with that big boy a-drainin' the wery life out on ye.'

The consciousness of having done a kind action made Mrs Saunders so cheerful that, when Sam started on his renewed search for work, she took off one of her old shoes by the trodden-down heel and flung it after him. 'Don't look back, or ye'll cross the luck, Mr Phillips,' she screamed, when he was going to pick it out of the gutter; and when he came back with good news about noon, Mrs Saunders gave the old shoe all the credit. We send missionaries to fetish-worshippers, but the amount of *bonâ fide* superstition—as idiotic as any that obtains in Africa—that is to be found amongst Englishwomen of Mrs Saunders's class, is humiliating from a 'philosophic'

stand-point, and both humiliating and appalling from a Christian. The good news met with a less heathenish reception when Sam, after mounting the staircase three steps at a stride, burst into the third-floor back. Polly had recognized his foot-fall, although it was so different from the languid foot-drag with which he had recently come up the stairs.

‘I’m going again now, Polly,’ he shouted. ‘Ten shillings a week more than we used to get in ——. The first person I met in the yard was young Mr D——, who was learning the business at ———, and he spoke up for me, and I’m to go on next Monday, and he’s lent me half-a-sov. to rub on with. I ran all the way back to tell you, and now I’ll run out and bring home some dinner.’

‘Let’s do something else first, Sam,’ said Polly, hugging her baby and crying as if some awful calamity were just about

to happen to it, and then soothing its fright with hungry kisses and sunlight shooting through the big drops that still rolled from her caressing eyes.

And then the husband and wife knelt down, and Polly put baby's hands together, and Sam gave thanks to God for his great goodness to them all.

For a few years things went well with Sam, although, perhaps, he was not quite so ready as his wife to regard as unmixed blessings the little ones that increased his family in rapidly regular series. When five fresh ones had made their appearance, he met with an accident which laid him up in hospital for months. He had not only broken his right arm, but also severely strained his back. As he was not a union man, Polly, as soon as their little savings were exhausted, would have been obliged to apply to the parish for relief, had she not gone out to work, as washerwoman,

charwoman—any work that she could get. She had to lock the children up in the one room that was then their home, whilst she was away, and many a time, when she was not washing or charing, neither did they nor she have any food until she came back at night with her hard-earned wage. But Polly never lost her faith in God, and once a week, at least, was sure to be sitting beside Sam's ticketed hospital bed, with a cheerful face and one of the little ones, both spruced up to the best of her ability, to make him think that things, after all, were not so very bad at home.

When Sam was discharged from hospital, work in his trade was slack, and his injuries had permanently weakened him. Once more he went round from foundry to foundry, but this time in vain. For a year or two odd jobs of the most miscellaneous kinds—and those only occasionally—were all the work that he could get. This was

a mortification to a craftsman honestly proud of his craftsmanship, but Sam's pride had been chastened. He eagerly jumped at the meanest employment, but often had to endure the misery of seeing his wife and his elder little ones toiling at the dismal 'industries' by which people on the verge of starvation try to earn a farthing in London, whilst he could contribute nothing to the common stock. And then Polly fell ill, and he was obliged to let strangers nurse the woman he had sworn to cherish. When he had left her at the hospital, and was going back to his children, who, poor as their home was, already missed a mother's care in it, Sam felt, he told me afterwards, as if 'life was all up' for his and him. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' he groaned, as he passed the grim little mud-splashed Independent chapel which he and Polly used to attend as long as they had

clothes at all decent to go in. But when he remembered who had said those words before him, he shuddered as if he had committed blasphemy. 'Who was I to complain?' Sam said. On his way back he called at the chandler's, and the chandler's wife, out of compassion for his children left without any mother to look after them, let him have a little more bread on credit. The little ones, clustered in the room that was bare of almost everything *but* them, had expected no supper that evening; and when they saw their father coming in with a half-quartern loaf under each arm, they almost forgot their grief for their mother.

The father and children ate their dry bread together, and then he heard them say their prayers, and undressed the youngest in man's clumsy style. The little one whimpered 'Mammy—I want Mammy,' and when it woke in the night,

and its groping little hand found nothing but its father's rough face to reassure it in the dark, it cried as if its little heart would break.

The greater part of the time Polly spent in hospital was a dreary time for Sam and the children ; but when Polly came out of hospital, Sam bore her off in triumph in a cab to a comparatively comfortable little home once more. Trade had revived, and owing to the brisk demand for workmen, Sam had found employment in his old craft again. The buffeted family spent the bright spring and summer in happy peace. Polly indulged in what a little time ago she would have thought the unattainable luxury, or the sinful extravagance, of half-a-dozen flower-pots ; the elder children went to school ; the family ' went to meeting ' again, and Sam and Polly had something to put into the plate when there was a ' collection.'

But as the leaves began to fall, the funds fell with them. The recently boastful city articles in the papers threw out lugubrious hints — cautiously worded at first, but daily becoming more openly prophetic of impending calamity.

One Saturday evening in late autumn Sam came home with fog-drops on his whiskers, and an atmosphere of half-iced fog around him that brought a chill into Polly's still cheerful little living-room. 'There, Polly,' he said dolefully, as he counted out his wages on the table, 'take care of it. I know you'll do that, dear old gal, but there's only one week's more to come from where that came from. Our place is to shut up next Saturday, and when it 'll open again nobody knows, and, so far as I can make out, everything is just as bad. We must trust in God again.'

'And who's better to trust to?' answered Polly. 'And don't you always

trust in Him, Sam ? I'm sure ye do, dear. Seems to me we've almost more need o' God to keep us straight when things are bright a bit than when we're down. We're apt to get bumptious else.'

An awful winter followed. Cold, famine, fever, killed the poor 'like flies.' The City and the West-End subscribed liberally, according to their wont, for our East-End sufferers ; but our local mendicants and a locust-swarm of their congeners from all points of the compass appropriated the bulk of the donations—bounteous but still insufficient—that were intended for those who would work if they could.

This wide-spread misery extended far into the spring. It was some time in May when our verger said to me, as he helped me to take off my gown after service, ' I've just heard, sir, that there's a whole family of decent folk dying, with nobody to look after them, in Dick's Buildings. Mrs

Flack, that sits in the second free-seat, told me.'

When I reached Dick's Buildings I found many clamorous applicants for relief, but even there the case I was in search of was exceptional; and, therefore, I had not much difficulty in finding my way to the damp cellar in which lay Sam, and his wife, and two of his children—the 'Reaper, whose name is Death,' had mercifully garnered the rest. Sam and Polly, with pinched, chalky faces, were lying side by side; the children, with legs and arms like sticks, squeezed in between them. The father and mother were almost unconscious; the elder child was languidly trying to put a laceless tag, which she had picked up, into a broken eyelet-hole of the one fragmentary boot she still possessed; the little boy was slapping his mother's face because she did not heed his cries. I had the poor creatures carried to the work-

house. They recovered there; and there I learned their history. When they were strong enough to move, our Emigration Committee sent them out to Canada. They sailed towards the end of a golden summer, and I accompanied them to their ship. It was a public holiday; flags were hoisted on the church towers, and the bells were pealing merrily. On our way to the docks, thinking it might please her as a last memento of the old country, I bought a little bunch of flowers for Polly. 'Thankee, sir,' she said, 'you mean it kindly, but, 'cept that my darlings are lyin' dead in it, I don't much care for England now. I've got no home now, 'cept heaven, where, please God, I shall meet 'em, and partings is no more.'

'Seems as if you were glad to get rid of us,' said Sam bitterly, as he listened to the pealing bells. 'But, thank God, we're going where a man that will work can work.'

I'll make you a good home yet, Polly, please God ; but that won't bring back the little uns, will it, poor old gal ?'

'God's good—He's got 'em, and He'll take care of 'em, Sam,' sobbed poor Polly.

As the *Ottawa*, bound for the country of the red-skins, was warped out through the dock-gates, the pale faces clustered on her bulwarks raised a shrilly ringing cheer, as if in defiance of the jubilant bells.

It was good for the emigrants, and for those they left behind, that they were going ; and yet that shrill hurrah of triumph echoes in my memory as one of the saddest sounds I ever heard.

XIV.

THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GIRL.

AFTER the service I have described at the Refuge, several days elapsed before I was able to visit it again. When I inquired of the matron what had become of her poor young county-woman, I found that she had left the Refuge on the Monday morning, and, although she had been offered shelter there for a week, she had not returned. 'I didn't expect she would, from the way she looked when she went out,' said the matron. 'Poor young thing! I can't help wondering where she is,

though I do see so many as bad off that come and go God only knows where. Maybe, she's at the bottom of the river. I haven't seen anything about it in the papers, but the river drowns many that the papers and the police know nothing about. I am not a nervous woman, but I declare to you, sir, when I've been coming over London Bridge of a night, I've been afraid to look down into the water, for fear I should see corpses with their eyes open. The lights on the river aren't nice to look at. Down they go, and shake as if they'd come to something in the dark they're frightened at.'

The shifting scenes at a Refuge for the Destitute are the reverse of kaleidoscopic, but they are as bewildering to the memory. The muddy tide of misery flows in to-night, and obliterates the marks made by the tide of the night before. A year went by, and probably the matron as well

as myself had forgotten the poor girl from Buckinghamshire, when she was recalled to my recollection by very painful circumstances in which I had to bear a part. One night in the end of November, or the beginning of December, I was returning from Wapping by Old Gravel Lane. As I reached the dock-bridge I saw a dim, white figure scrambling over it at the other end. I had just time to run and catch hold of a woman's dress—another moment, and she would have been in the water. She struggled fiercely; she very nearly leaped out of the flimsy skirt that came away from her waist in handfuls. 'Let go you—! What does it matter to you,' she howled, 'if I want to go to hell?' I managed, however, to pull the poor creature back, and to hold her arms behind her until a constable came down the lane to discover what the screaming was about. 'What's up?' he inquired. 'Robbing you, sir? Oh, going to jump

over, was she? Those Highway girls are always at it, when they've had a drop too much. What makes 'em all come down here, I can't make out. You must come to the station-house and make the charge, and appear at the court to-morrow, sir. Come along, my dear,' he added to the girl, clutching her above the elbow and pushing her before him, 'we'll find you a snugger bed than that.'

The inspector-in-charge did not treat the case with the constable's levity; but he, too, seemed to look upon the attempted suicide as a matter of course. 'You see, sir,' he said, when the girl had been locked in her cell, 'it's startling to you, but we've so much of it. Those poor creatures—God knows I pity them, though they do give us no end of bother—can't get on without drink. It's impossible they should. The brazenest of women couldn't lead their life without it. And sometimes they can't get

drink, and then they're miserable, and sometimes what they take only makes them miserabler. Anyway, the water's handy, and down they run screaming to made an end of it. It isn't many they've got to stop them.'

In no case is it more emphatically true than in that of these lost creatures that the way of transgressors is hard. The miserable girl's face was distorted by frantic excitement—she bit and struggled like a maniac, as she was dragged and pushed towards her cell—she dashed herself against the door and howled in the same mad style when the key had been turned upon her.

Next morning when she stood in the dock, bare-headed and bare-necked, and with her unseasonably flimsy dress hanging in crumpled tatters round her, she was an awfully lonely-looking object. Her excitement had passed, and she leaned on

the greasily-grimy boarding of the dock, apparently utterly careless as to what might become of her. The magistrate gave her the usual lecture on her 'sinful and criminal folly,' but he was a kind-hearted man, and was touched by her youth. Before committing her, he inquired whether she had not any friends who would take charge of her. (I had offered to do my best to get her into a Penitentiary, but thither she had sullenly refused to go.) When the magistrate made his suggestion, she woke up for an instant from her apathy. '*Friends!*' she exclaimed, in just the same tone of savagely-solitary satire which the Buckinghamshire girl had used. When I had seen the poor creature—her energy for physical resistance quite used up—obeying like a dog the officer's beck to leave the dock, I left the court, thinking much of her, and also of the poor

girl of whom she had suddenly reminded me.

What had become of that poor Buckinghamshire girl? Together with her personality, the matron's forebodings in reference to her came back to my recollection. So far as they related to death from starvation—perhaps even in the dark, cold, swiftly flowing river—I could not help sharing them; but what I remembered of the girl somehow disinclined me to believe that she could have attempted to stave off Death by forgetting that she was a woman.

That winter she turned up again at the Refuge. Her former reserve and fierce defiance of Fate had vanished. She was thankful for what was done for her, and though once more brought down to the lowest rung of life's ladder, she was hopeful as to the future. She talked freely

both to the matron and myself. I learnt her history, according to her version of it, and the parts of it which I was able to test all proved to be accurate. I will relate it now.

Her name was Winslow—Jane Winslow. She came from one of the quaintly named little Buckinghamshire villages. In the heart of East-End London, it was strange to hear her talking of that sleepy little place. Of course she gave no set description of it, but, putting together her little bits of local colour dashed in here and there, I could easily picture her old home—the old brown church begirt with green-and-grey boled beech trees; the red-and-purple brick parsonage, bossed with brown beehives and veiled with verdant vine and creamy clematis; the low black smithy, with its core of ruddy light, its roar of bellows, musical tinkle of hammers, and fringe of round-shouldered loungers heavily

circulating the village news ; the beamed thatched cottages of yellow plaster and grey rubble, with female gossips chatting and plaiting in the low doorways and against the flap-shutters — their fingers moving even faster than their tongues ; the old-fashioned rick-surrounded farm-houses, with their old-fashioned garden-jumbles of fruits and flowers and vegetables, grassy, crooked-boughed orchards, and barns and cartlodges with yard-wide patches of moss upon their thatch, and a rich arabesque of green and white and orange lichen on their warped, gaping weatherboards. Such a village, surrounded with quiet corn-fields, pastures, and dark fallows, deep fragrant woods, and hedges laced with dog-rose, and honey-suckle, and bellbind, we are apt to look upon as an island of purity and peace :—

‘ This is a place, you say, exempt from ill,
A paradise, where, all the loitering day,

Enamoured pigeons coo upon the roof,
Where children ever play.'

Of course this is nonsense. 'Alas!' as the poet adds,

'Time's webs are rotten, warp and woof;
Rotten his cloth of gold, his coarsest wear:
Here black-eyed Richard ruins red-cheeked Moll,
Indifferent as a lord to her despair.'

In country hamlets, as well as the Tower Hamlets, passions rage with bestial ferocity, and petty grudges are cherished in the country with a spitefully persistent rancour, which the life of a large city seldom allows time for. In the country, as well as in our town-slums, there is much of the misery that springs from overcrowded dwellings, as well as from lack of food and clothing. Wretched as is the physical, mental, and moral condition of our city waifs, there are counties in England in which the average agricultural labourer is weaker in body than the average 'City Arab,' far less sharp-witted,

and little, if at all, better-moralled. But still the country *is* the country: those who live in it can breathe sweet air, and see sweet sights, and hear sweet sounds, that constitute a literal 'heaven on earth' when contrasted with the surroundings of the dwellers in London slums.' The Refuge, in spite of its warmth and comparative cleanliness, was still a gaunt-looking place, crowded with gaunt-looking objects, in the very centre of a London slum; and it was strange, I repeat, to get, so to speak, a whiff from summer bean-fields in that wintry barrack, as Jane told of her life in the country. The greater part of it seemed to have been a peaceful one. Whilst still a child, she lost her mother; but she was not old enough then to understand what a loss that is, and yet soon became old enough to appreciate the importance of keeping her father's house and looking after her little brothers and sisters.

The father was a steady man, in regular work, and his wages, together with his children's plait-earnings, kept his family in cottage-comfort. Jane soon managed all domestic matters, and enjoyed the deferential affection which a wifeless father and motherless brothers and sisters are apt to give to the eldest daughter of a family so bereft. But just when Jane was blooming into womanhood John Winslow married again, and his second wife was a vixen, who began to teach her eldest stepdaughter 'her place' as soon as they came back from church on the wedding-day. For a week or two there were constant wranglings in the cottage that had been so quiet. John was an easy-going man, who detested rows. He loved his new wife, but he also loved his old wife's daughter, who had been the real second mother to his younger children. He tried to restore peace, but he was afraid to exercise authority over

either litigant, and so his feeble efforts only made confusion worse confounded. Whilst he was away at work one day, the stepmother struck Jane because she had interfered to save her youngest sister from a smacking.

‘I didn’t strike her back,’ said Jane, ‘but I couldn’t stand *that*. I put on my bonnet and shawl, and put my best gown and a thing or two more into a bag, and then I come out and said to her, “I’m going to make a home for myself and them as belongs to me. If you treat ’em cruel, mother ’ll come out of the church-yard and haunt ye. Poor father! I should ha’ liked to bid him good-bye, but it don’t matter much—he cares more for you than he does for me now.” “Of course he does, you brazen hussy,” says she. “Why ain’t you off? I thought you was in a hurry just now. I shall be glad enough to see your back—a good riddance of bad .

rubbish. Why don't you go and make your fortun' ? But you'll soon be coming back whining," says she. "I'll never set foot in this house again whilst you're in it," said I; and then I gave the little ones a kiss all round, and out I ran. When I got outside the garden-gate I saw the carrier's cart coming down the lane; so I waited for it, and rode into Buckingham. I'd my money with me—enough for that, and to pay my fare up to London, and p'r'aps to keep me for a week or two when I got there. The gleaners was in the fields, and after a bit I got the carrier to stop, so that I might pick up a handful o' ears for a keepsake like. I'd been very happy at home till that woman came to it, and so I wanted something to make me feel I still belonged to it somehow.'

Jane had looked forward to London with hope, but when she entered it her heart sank. How could all those people,

swarming about like ants, get a living? The vast majority of them were very unlike the fine thriving folks she had fancied all Londoners must be. And if *they* could somehow manage to rub on, because they knew the ways of the place, how was she, born and bred in a little Buckinghamshire village, and without a single friend amongst all those thousands to speak a good word for her, to squeeze her way into work?

When her money was exhausted, and still she found no work, Jane was sorely perplexed. In her country ignorance she had applied for plaiting-work in bonnet-shops, and had been laughed at for her pains. She had applied, also, at hiring-places for servants, but since she had no one to refer to for a character, she could not obtain a place. It would have been easy enough for her to get a character, if she had referred to the rector of her

parish, but she was obstinately bent on keeping her stepmother in ignorance of her whereabouts until, without anybody's aid, she had made a home in which she could gather together, at any rate, her brothers and sisters. When all her clothes, except what she wore, were gone, she did obtain a servant's place—of the kind that might be expected under such circumstances. Several such places she took and threw up very speedily. Although her employers did not trouble themselves about getting a character with their servants, Jane was still very proud of hers, and self-respect—heroically honest, under the circumstances—made her risk starvation again and again rather than risk *that*. The last situation she had held before she first came to the Refuge was the worst of all. She had very soon discovered that it was not for a domestic servant she had been hired. She instantly left the house

of sin, and a few nights afterwards made her appearance at the Refuge in the miserable plight and yet defiant mood I have already described. She thought that she did well to be angry—that God was unjust in allowing her to be reduced to such straits. ‘I thought it was hard,’ to quote her own words, ‘that I should have to shift about so, as if I was worth nothing—me as had always tried so to behave—I was real downright self-righteous in them days. If anybody had called me a sinner then, I do believe I should have struck ’em. I couldn’t abide your talk, sir, because you made out as if, somehow, I must be to blame after all. But I know better now, because I’ve got to love Him that came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’

When Jane left the refuge on the Monday morning, she was literally desperate. She wandered aimlessly, with no hope ex-

cept that the cold might soon finish her. In the early dusk of the winter afternoon she fell, fainting, on a threshold in one of the side-streets leading out of Leman Street. It was the threshold of a once-private house that had been converted into a 'slop'-maker's warehouse and workrooms. Some of the out-door women, coming back with work, found Jane lying on the threshold, carried her in to the nearest fire, and told their employer of her. He gave her hot coffee and bread and a night's lodging, and in the morning offered to give her work. The wages he named were very small, but Jane jumped at them as if they were a fortune. It must be remembered, too, that, like most plaiting-girls of her time, she knew next to nothing of needlework; and novices, especially when there is a glut of experts, cannot reasonably expect experts' wages for their work. She soon grew an expert, however, in such rough needlework

as was needed there. The pay, even then, was only just enough to keep soul and body together; but she was very proud of it, because it made her feel independent. At first she worked at the warehouse, but the talk she heard there was so distasteful to her—the fallen amongst her fellow-workers taking a fiendish delight in striving to reduce their unfallen companions to their own level—that Jane soon stipulated for permission to do her work in the bare garret which she tenanted. There are people in the world who do not like to be reminded that life is not so comfortable for all as—perchance, from infinitesimal merit of their own—*they* find it; that all girls are not as pure and untempted as *their* daughters, running their little round of grooved and fenced-in ‘respectability.’ At the risk of offending such people—blinking their eyes at Truth over their cosy fires—I must say that Jane had to mix every day with girls

who had lost their purity, and that her poverty sorely tempted her to follow their example. There was one girl, lodging in the same house, who night after night came up to Jane's room, attired in tawdry finery ; scoffed at her dimly candle-lit toil, and tried hard to persuade her to sell her good looks in open market. I write plainly, because it seems to me childish—in no child-like sense—to pretend to ignore notoriously patent facts. This same fallen girl, I must add, was the kindest friend Jane had for months. She was not a constant friend. She often abused Jane. She was often dead-drunk, drunkenly reveling, or madly raging, when Jane was in great extremity—even the poor slop-work being intermittent. But still this miserable devil-possessed Magdalen had a ' touch of God ' left in her, and ever and anon saved Jane from starving, when purer people had

left her to shift for herself. Just because of the multitudinous charities of London—absurdly over-lapping charities—the number of deserving, unbegging objects for charity who pine unaided in London, is disgraceful (to say nothing of other considerations) to the reputation for keen common sense, ‘business-like practicality,’ on which Londoners pride themselves. ‘To him who hath shall be given,’ is the sentence which far too many London charities might take as a damnatorily appropriate motto.

Her fellow-lodger’s kindness had far more weight with Jane than her scoffs; but Jane resisted both. ‘I don’t remember mother much,’ she said to the matron, ‘but I felt as if she’d turn in her grave if I went the way that poor girl wanted me to go—and then there was my little sisters I’d bragged I’d make a home for.’

But a more potent influence than the memory of her dead mother and her living 'little ones' ere long flowed in on Jane. One Sunday evening, foot-sore and heart-sore, she turned into a Methodist chapel. There she learnt the sad news that all are sinners—the glad news that all have a Saviour from their sins. When she told me of her chapel-going I must own that I felt grieved she had not learnt that inestimable lesson from church teaching instead of sectaries'; but the half-mean, half-filial feeling of jealousy was hurried away and drowned before and beneath the gush of joy with which the poor, half-starving girl repeated these verses from her new hymn-book :—

'O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,-
The triumphs of his grace !

'Jesus ! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease ;

'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

'He speaks—and, listening to his voice,
New life the dead receive;
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.

'See all your sins on Jesus laid :
The Lamb of God was slain :
His soul was once an offering made
For every soul of man.'

Jane stayed at the Refuge for about a week, and when she left the matron cried as if she were losing a child. 'Oh, how I wish I was coming with you!' sobbed Mrs Wendover. 'The country must look so beautiful this fine morning.'

I had written to the rector of the Buckinghamshire village, and he had written back to say that the stepmother was dead, and that John Winslow would be most thankful if Jane would again become the mistress of his home. 'I thank you kindly, sir,' said Jane, as she was starting from London, 'and Mrs Wendover, and all that

have been good to me. If you should ever come across that poor girl—'Liza Simmons is her name—you'll do what you can for her, won't ye, sir? She was very, very good to me, poor girl!'

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